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Four Youngsters and a Major.

BY ANDREW HOME.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time there were four children who lived for a good part of their time in a back garden. The garden belonged to the middle house of a terrace; there were brick walls, too high to be seen over, separating the gardens, so that each one was private and confidential so far as that went. In this particular house in question, beside the children, there lived a Guardian and a Governess, and the alliteration (look it out in the dictionary!) of their titles classed them together as belonging to the disagreeables of life—at least so the children thought. Of these last-named, two were boys and two were girls, an equal distribution numerically, but not otherwise, as the boys always found out. Their names were (ladies first, of course) Jenny, Sharlie, Harry, George, ages respectively, nine, five, eight, seven: so that you can see how the boys would be put upon.

They were, however, fairly good children, and did not quarrel on an average more than once a day; that is to

say, an allowance of one quarrel per day per child, which statement being worked out by rule of three (or rule of four in this case), will be found to be correct. Of course they were not in the garden all day long: I need not tell you that. They had lessons in the morning with Miss Griffin, the governess, from nine to twelve, with a quarter of an hour for refreshments midway, like a railway journey, but all the afternoon and part of the evening they had to themselves; and King John at Runnymede, and *amo*—I love, and seven times eight, and y-a-c-h-t, yot, and underrer—spreading—ches—nurtree—the—village—smithy—stands, and all the rest of it, were forgotten.

Now the Guardian had views: not views to be looked at—lakes and mountains, and ^oold Welsh women in high hats, and so on, to be put into a what-do-you-call-it and magnified, or into a magic lantern to be thrown on a sheet, or any such enjoyments; but something which meant that there must be no noise made in the house at certain times (as when the Guardian took his nap after dinner), and bread and milk for supper and porridge for breakfast, and to bed at eight, and other unpleasant regulations. The Guardian also objected to the children going out alone. They went for a daily walk with Miss Griffin for an hour, which was no fun except that there were the flagstones to walk over, taking care not to tread on the joins. To do that, you know, you have to make sometimes long strides and sometimes short ones; and Miss Griffin was always saying:

"Dear me, children, how badly you walk! Why cannot you proceed with regularity?"

"Regularity" and "Irregularity" were the favourite terms with Miss Griffin. Almost everything was classified under these two heads. Only the other day, while they were sitting in the school-room wading through a great history—alluded to, by the way, in a very unfeeling manner by the author as a "little primer": "little," indeed! There were seven hundred and fifty pages in it—only the other day they had heard the Guardian chastising the cat "Topsy" with his slipper out in the hall. Whereupon Miss Griffin, who liked to be at the bottom of all that went on, opened the door and asked:

"Any irregularity, Mr. Stone?" (which was the Guardian's name).

"Irregularity? I should think so, indeed; the cat has just got at the salmon on the table" (giving the animal a parting whack with his slipper).

"Dear me! How very irregular! Children" (coming into the room again and shutting the door), "we will resume with the Accession of King Henry the Seventh; Jane" (she never shortened their names at all), "Jane will read."

But all this has nothing to do with the garden, except that it was part of the Guardian's views that they should go there every day alone, without the governess, and do as they pleased. It was not, you will be good enough to understand, a particularly pretty or well-kept garden; but what it lacked

in tidiness it made up in size, so that great things could be done there. It was possible, for instance, to get lost ; to have a search party organized, and to find the wanderer again, without much pitiful pretence of being seen all along.

The four children, of course, had their own gardens, and grew an immense amount of nothing. Great preparations were always made for the flowers which never came up ; long strings were nailed up the wall for the creepers to climb upon ; elaborate scare-crows were set up to frighten the sparrows, which said scare-crows were of such a terrifying appearance as to really alarm the two youngest children when they chanced to go into the garden alone, infinitely more (only they would not confess to it) than any birds or even cats, though the cats would stop and spit at the black objects now and again.

It may perhaps be mentioned here, that to dig seeds up too frequently for the purpose of seeing how well they are growing is a mistake. The candy-tuft and convolvulus and cress and what not, resent this treatment and strike work, which does not mean that they strike up or down as is required of them, but that they simply do nothing. And then the scare-crows get knocked over, and the birds hop along as bold as you please and pick up every single seed, and the cats come and scratch round the borders in their well-known manner.

And talking of cats reminds me that this was a great district for them ; you could scarcely go out into the Stone's

garden at any time but you would see one or two or sometimes more of these animals on the neighbouring walls. The children had names for them all, as was proper; else how were they to be distinguished. To call a cat by his colour is a poor makeshift. And suppose you know two or three or more Tabbies, or Blacks, or Whites, where are you then? The largest cat of all that the Stone children knew was a monstrous tabby, and he was called Bishop Bonner—or usually just Bonner, for short—because of a striking resemblance to that ill-favoured prelate as exhibited in a picture in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, a work regularly consulted on Sunday afternoons, with great fear and trembling lest, as Mary the housemaid said, the Prince of Wales when he come to be King shud turn Kartholic and they shud all be——; but let us pursue these horrors no farther, we are forgetting all about the cats. Well, Bonner the cat, like his namesake the Bishop, was not to be trifled with, and you could not get near enough to him to give him a stroke, or even, on second thoughts, to pull his tail, no matter how much you wanted to. He would sit up on one part of the wall where it joined the outhouse roof, high up, and simply smile at you—not a pleasant smile you understand, but a disdainful and wicked smile. And here, if anyone is bold enough to venture the objection that cats cannot smile, he is hereby told that he is not a true cat-student, but merely a superficial learner. Let him wait until he has taken his degree of M.C., or Master of Cats, before making further remarks.

The other cats were provided with both Christian and surnames; the first being the one given by the children, and the other the name of the household to which the cat belonged, thus :—Tiff Robins, a bilious-looking yellow animal; Keziah Jenkins, a tortoise-shell and white, very thin, and the quickest cat to get over a wall when you shouted that you ever saw; James Barnard, a good, steady tabby; and a great many more in like manner. One reason why Bonner had his special name was because he was a wanderer upon the face of the earth and belonged to nobody—a stray Jeff, the children called him, they called all the members of the cat-tribe Jeffs: I don't know why or I would tell you. Then, of course, they had their own Topsy of previous dishonourable mention. Topsy frequently held cat assemblies of an evening, when all those acquaintances I have named and many others were accustomed to attend. There was no shyness among them, and they all conversed to that degree and with such ardour, that everyone who lived near was aware when the company had arrived. The Guardian used to arise in the night and solemnly discharge missiles for the sole purpose apparently of breaking up the joyous festival, but then he was not a sympathetic man. In the morning, John, the boot-boy, was sent out to gather up the shot and shell of the unequal combat—bits of soap, hair brushes, boot-jacks, and the like.

Likewise, as our good friend, Joe Gargery (do you know him?), observes, "there was dogs" (though let no one copy the deplorable grammar), but these dogs were not

on view, being unable to get out of their own gardens and places where their kennels were. The Stone children had no dog; they wanted one dreadfully, but the Guardian refused to entertain the idea. "Savage brutes," he was accustomed to call them; a mild puss was all he would tolerate, and you cannot dress up a cat and make him smoke a pipe; you may try, but it's no use. Like all children who are worth anything, they were fond of animals, and had a grand scheme once of buying a young donkey with their united capital—3s. 4½d.—and letting him graze on the grass-plat, but that idea was nipped in the bud.

They would have made even another purchase if they could. One day an organ man had come with a monkey. An organ man *without* a monkey was a very common-place personage; there was one who came every Wednesday and played the "Last Rose of Summer" very badly, with plenty of notes left out. But a monkey! Miss Griffin always sat with her back to the window, and so could not see the little fellow jumping and grimacing along the window-sill. When he pulled off his little peaked cap in a very jerky manner, made them a low bow, and then stuck it on again very much on one side, they were all ready to die with laughing. Miss Griffin at last, seeing that something unusual was going on outside, turned round, and then (she was not a lady who possessed a sense of humour) observed in her usual set manner:

"I am at a loss to imagine why the antics of a stupid ape

should provoke your merriment." Then, in a louder tone, and with angry gesticulation through the window, "No, no! How dare you! Go away, man; I have nothing for you!"

But the Italian, according to the custom of his kind, refused to understand, and Sharlie had at last to be sent out with a penny, receiving in return a funny little squeezing handshake from the monkey which sent her into ecstasies. They all longed to have this monkey for weeks after and planned to buy him, but his master never came again.

I am forgetting one other possession: Sharlie had a canary (you will think me a long time in getting to the Major, but never fear, he is coming, as we used to say of Mr. Sims Reeves) —Sharlie, I say, had a canary, and in course of time it fell ill and died. The dreadful news of this final catastrophe was brought up to the bedroom in the morning—the lamented decease having taken place in the night—by the housemaid, who briefly announced:

"The bird's dead, Miss Sharlie."

"Now!" exclaimed Sharlie, in a delighted voice, and as though she had been longing for the event, "now we shall have a funeral."

"Well, Sharl, I must say," said Jenny, "you *are* a heartless child. Poor Dick's dead and you seem quite glad. I'm sure I was fonder of him than you were, though he *was* your bird."

“Why,” said Sharlie, indignant that she should be suspected of a lack of natural feeling, “of course I shall sob at the grave”—a confession which put matters right between the sisters at once.

Whether the tears did actually flow when required on the mournful occasion referred to, I do not know. But a funeral was certainly held, because it was not often that they had the pleasure of burying—no, of course, I mean the sorrow of burying—anything that had once been alive. Dolls were, I need not say, buried from time to time. A hole of great depth was dug—no mere apology for a grave, but a huge excavation, the hollowing out of which occupied the united exertions of the four for a day or two. A prodigious heap of earth was raised by the side of the hole, and the cavity itself was so large, that when the smallest of the four—Sharlie—stood up in it, only her head and shoulders appeared above the top. In the side of this mighty opening, a cave was scooped out, and here the deceased was carefully laid to rest; the opening being then boarded up (timber obtained from empty fig boxes), and all the earth shovelled back again as quickly as possible.

“Why, I declare it has taken me the whole of this chapter simply to introduce my young friends to you. But now we really are going to begin.”

CHAPTER II.

I think I said that there were brick walls round the garden. Now a certain brick in the wall on one side had long been an object of special attention to all my young friends. It was a soft brick, and easily crumbled away when poked and scraped with any hard instrument, such as an old mop nail; even a blunt slate pencil had proved useful sometimes to this end. Bricks cannot crumble away for ever without something happening; and one fine afternoon, when the attentions of Master Harry in this particular direction had been unusually vigorous, suddenly what remained of the brick went through all in one piece into the next door garden, and there was a fine large hole to spy through. The four heads were, of course, applied without delay, one after the other, to the aperture, and they all enjoyed the view exceedingly: all the more because the next door garden gate was always carefully kept shut, and they had never seen into the place before. Their enjoyment of the view, however, was not increased, to put it mildly, when someone suggested, "What would Major Robins say?" for that you must know was the Major's garden. (We have come to him at last, you see.) He was a terrible fellow, this Major, with a very red face and a fierce-looking white moustache; he always wore a white top hat, and carried a thick bamboo, which increased the ferocity of his appearance. He had a remarkably loud,

voice, and always spoke to his servants as though addressing a file of soldiers.

No sooner was this terrible thought of what the Major would say to have a hole made into his private garden—for that was what it amounted to—no sooner, I say, was this idea fully grasped by all four conspirators in all its startling intensity, than—*horribile dictu!*—the Major's rasping voice was heard at the top of his garden giving instructions to Thomas, his man, about the vines, and then—

"I'm just going to see how the tulips are looking. I shall gather two or three. There are two, at least, which are quite enough out."

"Yessir," replied the voice of Thomas, as though this operation was a matter of the greatest importance, and so indeed it was in the Major's household. Anything said or done by that officer was regarded in a very sacred light by his servants.

Now the tulips, as ill-luck would have it, were just under the wall where the brick had been pushed out; and when the Major came stumping down to that particular spot along the gravel path, and there paused, the children shaking with fear on the other side of the wall felt certain that the next instant he would see the hole and make a disturbance about it. Major Robins, however, first directed his searching gaze upon his fine tulip bed, and what he saw was that a largish piece of brick had fallen upon two magnificent specimens and broken them short off, crushing the petals in a dreadful manner.

The Major gave one loud snort of anger, and then he roared in a voice of thunder :

" Thomas ! "

" Coming, sir," cried Thomas, arriving at a run with the words scarcely out of his mouth. The Major's servants were accustomed to do his bidding with great celerity.

" Just look here, Thomas," cried the Major, striking the ground with his stick in a warlike manner ; " do you know anything of this ? Two of my finest blooms broken short off—completely ruined ! "

" No, sir, I know nothink of it," said Thomas, very much frightened ; " I never see nothink wrong with the toolips this morning, sir." .

" Some scoundrel must have been throwing stones or fragments of brick. I'll find him out and prosecute him. By George ! I will ! "

The children heard and trembled, and wished that they had fled while there was yet time. They dare not run now for fear of attracting attention.

At this moment the Major caught sight of the hole and gave a loud exclamation.

" Look there, Thomas," thrusting his stick through (a terrible temptation seized the children at the moment to pull it in from their side, but they resisted it, fortunately), " that's where the brick came from. Very extraordinary thing you shouldn't have noticed that before, Thomas."

"Yessir," acquiesced Thomas, meekly. It was always best to agree with the Major, it saved trouble.

The Major thrust his face as near the aperture as possible, and called out in a terrible voice :

"Hi, there !."

There was no response. The children had shrunk back against the wall, and he could see nobody in the garden. The hole was rather low down, and the Major had to stoop to get near it, thereby occasioning a great rush of blood to the head, and causing him to grow purple in the face. He arose gasping, and resumed his upright position with some difficulty.

"I can see no one in the garden," he said, "it appears to be in a most neglected state. I can't stoop again, Thomas," wiping his face with a handkerchief, "do you see if you can see anything."

"No, sir, I can't see nothink," said Thomas, after applying his eye to the point of vision.

"It is the work of those little wretches, I feel certain of it," said the Major. "I shall go round at once and see Mr. Stone upon the matter. Perfectly disgraceful!" and the old fellow stumped up the path into the house again.

The children stood looking blankly at one another until they heard a violent ringing at the front door, and then they fled into the outhouse and waited. Pretty soon the Major and Mr. Stone both came down the garden together; and the Major, having inspected the hole from one side of the

wall—his own side, now had the pleasure of inspecting it from the other.

“A most remarkable thing,” they heard the Guardian say; “I never remember their doing anything of the kind before. I can’t think where the children are. Hi! Harry, Jenny—where are you?”

Upon this there was an immediate surrender on the part of the garrison in the outhouse. They all sallied out very sheepishly and feeling most uncomfortable. Now the children were drilled every morning, and knew all about marching and that kind of thing; and they now came out from their retreat in single file, and formed up with a half-right turn—a compact phalanx in front of the two gentlemen. The Major was delighted with the precision of the small manoeuvre.

“Capital!” he exclaimed; “very well done!” All his anger evaporated in a moment; he burst into a great roar of laughter. “I shall order you all to the guard-room,” he said.

Mr. Stone was relieved to find his irascible visitor so easily pacified, and promised that the wall should be mended. The children said they were sorry they had hurt the flowers. So that little incident ended, and they were friends with the Major from that time onward. As for Thomas, who, between you and me, had been listening on the other side of the wall, he had never heard his master laugh in that way for years, and described his feelings

graphically in the kitchen afterwards as being "fair mazed;" and expressed his opinion in strict confidence, and with a deeply mysterious shake of the head, that "it was the sight of the young 'uns as done it."

Advantages ensued from the friendship: Major Robins had a fine orchard out in the country, and in the autumn he sent the children great hampers of apples and pears; giving great delight and many stomach-aches to our four young friends. He would actually drag out a kitchen chair into his garden to stand upon, so that he might look over at them; and the Stone children at first used to be quite startled when his scarlet visage rose, like the summer sun, over the coping of the wall. Thomas was always retained on these occasions to hold the chair steady—a very necessary precaution, for the Major was of a good weight. He never showed his face in this friendly way but he had something to give them: either a packet of butter-scotch, or perhaps a great cocoa-nut, or some other delightful and indigestible thing. The Guardian never heard of these gifts, or of the conversations which used to take place in such an undignified way. The Guardian, when he was not at his office, kept to his own room, which was in the front of the house, where he could see nothing that was going on, and hear nothing, which was better still.

By and bye, when they had come to look upon the Major quite as an old friend, he sent in an invitation for them all to go in in the afternoon and have tea with him. This was

a very extraordinary proceeding on the Major's part, because he never had any visitors, and no one came to his house from year's end to year's end. His housekeeper, Mrs. Cruden, and the other servants, Thomas especially, all thought that their master must be growing rather childish, which was indeed the fact, though only in a good sense ; it was, I consider, a compliment to the Major to say so, rather than not.

Well, as you may think, the children were in a considerable state of excitement over this visit, though they did feel just a trifle shy. They were very curious to know all about the inside of the Major's house ; and then, it was an unheard of thing for them to go into any other home than their own. On the appointed afternoon, when they had received a long lecture of instructions on their behaviour from Miss Griffin, which I regret to say they straightway forgot, and feeling generally rather tight about the neck in consequence of clean collars, and rather clumping about the feet in consequence of new Oxford shoes, they all marched out of their own front door, down the steps, along the flags for a yard or two, then up the Major's steps and into the porch before his door. There they stood for a minute or two to collect themselves, and then they set about pulling the bell.

Now this is a more serious matter than you would perhaps imagine, especially when you are going to a house for the first time where you wish to make a good impression, as all my young friends were anxious to do. Harry, as the eldest boy, took hold of the great brass bell handle and gave a very

gentle pull, because these bells take a great deal of knowing, and you may very likely, before you know where you are, ring a great peal that makes the people inside think the place is on fire, startling them dreadfully, and putting them in a bad humour with their visitors. In this case it did not matter whether the bell rang or not, for Thomas was on the look-out for them, and when he heard the bell-handle creak, he had the door open in a twinkling, grinning to that extent that you would have thought he must be very pleased to see the company arrive. And so indeed he was; and so, too, was the Major himself, who came out of his room at that moment and met them in the hall, and made them feel at home in a moment; even the youngest of them was not afraid of him. A yellow cat came out with the Major, rubbing round his legs, with her tail all stuck up; and the four visitors cried out in chorus:

“Why, there’s Tiff Robins!” It seems somehow so odd to see her anywhere but on a wall.

“Hey, what’s that?” cried the Major, looking very much puzzled; and they began to think that the name might seem like taking a liberty, and Jenny, blushing a good deal, explained how it was as well as she could. Whereupon the Major laughed immensely, and seemed as gratified as if someone had told him a very fine joke indeed. Then he suddenly looked ashamed that Thomas, who was standing by, should hear him laugh in that way—Thomas had ventured on a small private chuckle himself—and spoke

quite crossly to him, and asked him what the—what in the world he meant by standing grinning there, and whether he hadn't anything better to do, and so on.

"I beg your pardon, my dears," said the Major, as he led them upstairs; "he's a very idle man—very idle, and I have to be sharp with him."

Safely piloted aloft they all saw Mrs. Cruden, the house-keeper, who wore a most wonderful cap, and who looked quite different from what they had expected, after seeing her out of doors in a bonnet as big as a clothes-basket. Then they were taken into a fine large room at the top of the house, which seemed made for a play-room, there was so much space in it and no things to knock over. And here there was a great collection of very fine toys—splendid bricks for building, so many and so large that you could make almost anything you chose; and horses, and tin soldiers—any quantity of tin soldiers—and railway trains, and puzzles, and a dulcimer, and—but there! I cannot remember half the things there were. The children had never seen such a lot of wonders together anywhere out of a toy shop, and they noticed that the toys, though they were so good, were all of them old-fashioned, and the colours on them were dim, and though they had been dusted recently some of the dust was still upon them, as though they had been packed away for very many years.

The Major had left them when he had shown them the room, and wished them a good time (he said he thought

they would enjoy themselves better without him, and I dare say they did feel rather easier), but Mrs. Cruden had come in; and while the two boys were setting upon the bricks, and Sharlie had got hold of a hairy goat that squeaked when you poked his head down, though it was rather an asthmatic cry as though Billy had caught a bad cold from being shut up so long—Mrs. Cruden, I say, was saying to Jenny how sorry she was that there were no dolls in the collection: they were all boys' playthings. Jenny very politely said that didn't matter at all; but Mrs. Cruden was glad to have someone to talk to, and went on to say that all the things there belonged to the Major's son when he was a boy, and that this was his play-room. The toys were packed up in those two big boxes, she said, and the Major had been all the morning unpacking and dusting them and furbishing them up.

"But where is Major Robins' son?" asked Jenny, "and why doesn't he live with his father, and keep him from being so lonely?"

"Hush! my dear," said Mrs. Cruden, in a whisper; "don't say any more about Master Charles, there's a dear. I oughtn't to have mentioned it. What the Major would say, I'm sure I don't know. See, here's a model of a Swiss cottage that Master Charles made himself; isn't it beautiful? I haven't seen it for years: but so natural, I'm sure it is, though the chimneys always *were* shaky." Here a voice from below was heard calling:

"Mrs. Cruden, Mrs. Cruden!" and that good lady with a

"There, my dear, there's the Major, I must go," hurried away.

Well, those children had a grand time up there alone. They imprisoned the goat in a fortress of the bricks, leaving that noble animal there without supplies of hay or other sustenance in a most hard-hearted manner. They then imagined the place to be on fire, and brought him forth from amidst the flames at the peril of their lives. They placed him upon a railway truck, and ran him at great speed, and with no regard to his nervous system, all over the room. They built everything you can well imagine. I don't know what they didn't do. They mentally compared their own inferior toys at home—especially their pitifully small bricks, and disparaged their own possessions with united voice. They had, in fact, such a good time, that they had no idea how the clock was going, until Mrs. Cruden came up again to tell them tea was ready.

And such a fine time, too, as they had over tea you cannot imagine. The Major turned out to be a very funny man indeed, and made them all laugh to that degree that it was a wonder they had time to eat anything, but of course they did that too, and there were such lots of nice things. They all wished the Guardian could have seen them having twice of cake—*twice* indeed! Why bless me! however many times?—but my reckoning powers are very poor.

Then after tea the Major had lots of things to show them. He took down his great sword and drew it, and made them

stand back while he whirled it about his head in a terrifying manner. Then he could imitate the animals in a farmyard beautifully, and could act catching a wasp in a handkerchief, until the children all felt perfectly certain that the wasp was there, though they knew it wasn't wasp-time yet—thank goodness ! And he made a man answer him from somewhere up the chimney ; and gave a talk between two old women so funnily, that our four young friends all rolled on the floor in convulsions of laughter.

But all pleasant times have an end, you know ; and at last, all too soon, it was time for them to go. They had all trooped out to get on their coats and cloaks (that was through the careful Guardian, lest they should take chills or other dreadful things, although they only lived next door), they had all trooped out, I say, when little Sharlie came running back with something in her hand. It was a picture she had found inside a puzzle-box in the play-room—a queer place for a photograph to be in—and she had put it on the hall table when they came down to tea without anyone seeing it.

“ Look ! Major Wobbins,” she cried, holding it up, “ look what I've found upstairs ! ”

It was the portrait of a boy, taken at the age of twelve or thirteen ; a fine, handsome fellow, with slightly curling hair, and a look about him that you could not help liking.

The Major took the card, and his face changed all in a moment, so that Sharlie was quite frightened. He had been

laughing just the moment before, and now he looked terribly grave—and why did his hand shake so when he held the photograph up?

“Thank you, my dear,” he said, very gently. “I’m glad you have found this; I had been looking for it everywhere,” and he stooped down and kissed Sharlie. She wondered why his voice sounded so queer.

“Is that your little boy, Major Wobbins?” she asked, with a child’s curiosity.

“Yes, my dear,” said the Major, rubbing his eyes in an unsteady fashion.

“I’m sorry he’s dead,” said Sharlie. “Is your little boy dead, and is that why you are so sorry?” and she crept close to the old gentleman who had sunk down into his easy chair, and put an arm round his neck very fondly.

“No, my dear, he’s not dead—but I *am* sorry—I cannot help it. Never mind, my dear, never mind” (very huskily).

Here Jenny’s voice from without interrupted the interview:

“Come, Sharlie, where are you? Come and have your cloak on,” and she had to go.

By the time the little company had returned in order to say good-night, the Major was quite his old self (Sharlie could see nothing of the photograph), and bade them good-bye very cheerfully, and said that they must come again, which you may be sure they promised to do.

When the front door had closed upon the lively young people, the house felt very silent. The Major drew the

picture out of his pocket, and sat by the fire with it in his hand for a long time. It was his own boy's face he was looking at through eyes misty with rising tears, thinking of long ago when Charlie had played in the house with his young companions, just as these children had been doing to-day Yes, that was a happy time, he reflected. No cloud had ever come between them then He thought bitterly of what followed; when this son grew up to be a man, he had married a girl of his own choosing, and not of his father's. This had enraged the old gentleman, and he had roughly told his son that, as he had made his own choice, he might now abide by it, for he should never enter that house again. Young Charles, who had a spirit as proud as his father's, had taken him at his word, and from that day they had never seen each other. That was ten years ago and more, and the old man had fancied that he had quieted his memory. But, from the time when he first began to know the children in the next house, the old thoughts and associations had returned, with greater and greater force as each day went by, and it was the sight of his boy's playthings that day that had touched him more than all, that had made him decide.

He took a candle and went upstairs to the old play-room, still holding the photograph in his hand. How often he had come in at that door and seen that frank young face raised to meet his! His pride was all broken down: the poor old man fell upon his knees, and sobbed out a confession

of his wrong before the Great Father. He remained there a long time ; " my poor boy, my poor boy," he kept repeating to himself. When at last he went down stairs, the first thing he did was to write a letter ; he could scarcely hold his pen, poor old fellow, but he managed to write somehow, and it was addressed to " Charles Robins, Esq." I can tell you that much, though what was inside is private property. One thing is quite certain, however : the Major said he was sorry.

So that is what those four youngsters did. Charles and his wife live with the Major now ; they have two little girls who are great friends with the Stone children.

There ! the story is done.

Spiced Gingerbread.

BY MRS. MOLESWORTH.

THERE must be in everybody's life, I fancy, certain things in the past which stand out in a curiously marked and distinct way, even though in themselves of very little consequence. Things more especially to do with one's childhood, which some perfect trifle recalls to one as vividly as if they had only just occurred.

I suppose the explanation of this is that such things made a deep mark *at the time*, deeper than we then knew. And children's natures are very capricious; some things run off them like water down a duck's back, some seem almost burnt in to their memories.

To-day—in a country far away from the one where I spent my earliest years—to-day, at the afternoon “coffee,” instead of “tea,” of a friend in this queer old German town, I tasted some cake which, though not exactly the same, strongly resembled the “spiced gingerbread” which gives its name to this little sketch of a long, long ago experience of mine.

I was about seven years old. My sister, Cynthia, was nearly two years older. But in her own imagination and in

mine there was far more than that between us. She was the dearest and kindest and most unselfish of little elder sisters, but she was *very* "elder sister" all the same. We laugh at it now—she *cries* over it, she declares—but with all her love and generosity, she did make me suffer sometimes. For I was terribly timid and terribly shy, and my terrors sometimes betrayed me into faults and actions that Cynthia, entirely fearless, strong, and resolute, could not treat very leniently. She could not understand them, and so she was too severe, meaning it, as she used to say then, and as I know was true, "all for your good, Belle."

She says now that she deceived herself—she calls herself in the past "a horrid little dictatorial tyrant," and so on, till I tell her it really hurts me for her to malign her childish self so.

We spent a part of every year, at that time, at a dull, old-fashioned little seaside town, which we children thought paradise. Our mother used to take us there, and instal us in the same well-known lodgings, under the care of a trustworthy nurse, and then she, after a week or so with us, would hurry back again to keep our father company in his busy life as an often over-worked "professor" of such very learned things, that I think I will leave them to my readers' imagination. Now and then they would pay us a flying visit—sometimes towards the end of the time, they both came for a whole fortnight, though more often they went abroad for a few weeks, calling it their "honeymoon," for

a complete change of scene was the best tonic for papa.

And we were perfectly happy at Villamarina, for such was the rather absurd name of the sea-bathing place, even though it was on the English coast. *Quite* long ago I believe it was called Sandypool, then a company took it up, meaning to do great things with it, which never came to pass, though Villamarina it remained.

There was only one crook in our lot there, one thorn amidst the rosy delights of bathing and wading, and even, on rare occasions as a great treat, shrimping—of sand-castle building and donkey-riding and no-lessons doing, which made the round of our happy days.

This crook—or crooks, for there were two of them—consisted of some old, I might almost say aged, relatives of ours whose home was at Villamarina. Or rather, to be more precise, in the fact of our being obliged to pay duty visits to these ancient ladies, for of course they might have lived in their queer little house in the main street, "The Parade," of the place, for ever and a day, for all we cared, if only we had not had to go to see them from time to time.

"Time to time" does not sound enough. It was nearly always once a week, generally on a Saturday afternoon, as far as I remember. Now and then if we had colds, or the weather were rainy, though looking back I can recollect very few colds, and almost never anything but sunshine in those delightful seaside days, now and then we did manage to skip a weekly visit. And I think nurse was as glad as we were,

if she could find a real good excuse. But a day or two after, there would be sure to come in one of dear mamma's letters a reminder like this :

"You do not speak of Cousin Alethea and Cousin Bridget. I hope they are well, and that you went to see them last Saturday," or "How are the great-cousins?" for that was the name we children gave them. "My love to them both."

Now *some* people might think there must have been a reason for this—some more or less selfish reason. For both papa and mamma knew that we did not like going to see the old ladies, though I don't think they quite knew *how* much we—I especially—disliked and dreaded it. But there was no reason for it, except pure kindness and pity for the solitary lives which had so little to brighten them. The Misses Malliford were very poor, pitifully poor, considering their good birth, and we were their only living relations. They were really, I believe, both fond of us children and proud of us. They were very proud of papa; that was one bond between us, though we did not like the way they sometimes talked of mamma, as if she were a person of very little consequence. We told her so, one day, but she only laughed.

"You need not mind, dears," she said. "They have no unkind feeling to me. It is only that my grandfather was what they consider much beneath them, because he made money in iron works. Poor old ladies—if you do find it

rather trying to go to see them, I don't think that makes it any the less right and kind; do you?"

"Certingly not," said Cynthia, in her decided way. How well I remember it! I can hear her "Certingly not," now—and it was no use mamma's making her say over and over "*certainly, certainly*;" the moment she was left to herself out came the "certingly" clearer than ever. She was only eight and three-quarters that summer. "Certingly not, mamma. But Belle is really rather naughty about it. She nearly cries when we're to go, and last time she danced about the nursery and called them witches."

"*Belle!*" said mamma, very gravely.

And I felt so ashamed that I hadn't the courage to tell her what I had nearly fixed—I would—that I really *was* rather afraid that the great-cousins were witches.

After we had been to see them two or three times, it did not seem so bad. It was the first visit of the year that was the worst, because we hadn't then got accustomed to their queer, stiff ways. They always asked us the same questions about our lessons and our needlework, and Miss Alethea—she was the elder sister, and *we* thought the plainer, though papa said she had been a beauty—made us play on the squeaky old piano to show how we were getting on, and then expected us to say a piece of poetry.

It was dreadful—my fingers seemed to turn into pieces of stick, and by the second verse I was *sure* to begin humming and hawing over my poetry. Cynthia always had to help

me out with it. Cynthia was the favourite, and no wonder. Sometimes, if Cousin Alethea got really vexed with me, for I was very stupid and tiresome, I daresay, she would call me "Missy," in what I thought a horrid way.

"Missy's memory is not at its best to-day," or "Dear, dear, something has rubbed Missy the wrong way, I'm afraid."

She did not mean to hurt me. She was really a kind-hearted, unselfish creature, and so was gentle Miss Bridget. But it was *so* long since they had been young—they had lost touch with childhood, though perhaps only on the surface. Afterwards I came to feel sure it was only in appearance that they did not understand us, that lower down, their old hearts were still fresh and loving.

They did their very best to entertain us, for they had high notions of hospitality and of gratitude. For papa, though of course we did not know it then, was very good and generous to his old cousins-twice-removed. And I have very little doubt that the small treats they prepared for us, and the queer gifts they never forgot to present us with when the last visit of the season came round, were provided at the cost of some self-denial, where there was little room for any. They were *so* poor and so old.

I have not yet mentioned the worst trial we had to go through on our visits. It had to do with these hospitable intentions of our great-cousins, and it took the shape of spiced—most highly spiced—gingerbread!

You see the old ladies' ideas of what pleased children were entirely based on what the children of *their* young days liked. At least, so I suppose. And evidently when Great-cousin Alethea and Great-cousin Bridget were little girls, gingerbread must have been considered a special delicacy.

They made it themselves. They had a recipe which had been handed down "in the family" since Queen Elizabeth's reign, for all I know. Miss Alethea was generally the confectioner. How she managed it I do not know, but *nobody* could have believed that that gingerbread had been made less than a score of years ago. It might have been her own christening cake. Yet it *was* freshly made every two or three weeks certainly, during the time of our stay at Villamarina, for the old ladies always told us when they had had a cake making, and I know they were very truthful.

But oh, it was so very nasty! Perhaps the spices, including the ginger, had been handed down "in the family" with the recipe. It tasted like it. Once or twice when some accident had prevented the baking, we escaped the gingerbread, and instead, they gave us, with many regrets and apologies, two or three very hard finger biscuits, "savoy biscuits" I think they called them, and an orange each. That was a red-letter day—more for escaping the gingerbread than for the delights of the other delicacies, though however stale a biscuit is, it is not spiced!

Cynthia was not nearly so bad as I about the gingerbread. She used to munch it up bravely. I really don't think she

disliked it as much as I did. I tried all sorts of things. I used to watch the plate before it was handed to me and settle which was the smallest piece, but if it happened to be the furthest from me, I dared not reach over for it. I tried pretending to take a whole piece and breaking off the larger part of it in lifting it. I tried slipping my slice into my pocket—but all my schemes failed. Either Miss Bridget thought I was modest through shyness, and insisted on my having a second piece—which was, indeed, out of the frying-pan into the fire—or Miss Alethea's spectacles looked as if I were greedily fishing for the biggest slice, or—that was the one time I tried the pocket dodge—Cynthia caught me in the act, and fixed me with such a look of horror in her bright blue eyes, that I had to draw my guilty hand out again and pretend I had been feeling for my handkerchief, and eat the cake straight off.

There came at last a Saturday when my gingerbread troubles got to the worst. Nurse had taken us to the little house in the Parade and left us there, to call for us again in an hour or so, as was the custom on those occasions.

When we entered the tiny drawing-room, only Miss Bridget was there. She received us as usual with her nervous, fussy gentleness. "Sister," she said, was not very well, but she would come presently.

"Should we not have come in, do you think, Cousin Bridget?" said Cynthia quickly. "I can run after nurse and call her back."

My hopes rose, and I started to my feet; how nice it would be if we didn't need to stay! And in her heart I believe Cynthia felt the same. But no such luck.

"Oh dear no," said Miss Bridget, "Cousin Alethea would be most sorry not to see you, my love. She was quite distressed yesterday when she felt so tired, thinking she would not be able to make the gingerbread for you. For sister likes to make it herself, and you may remember her remarking last week that it was all done."

Again my spirits rose. I could bear anything if there was no spiced gingerbread!

"I'm sure it doesn't matter," said Cynthia, in her polite way. "We should be sorry for you to think we come for the sake of the cake, Cousin Bridget."

"Ah, but it is all right, I am glad to say," the old lady replied. "Sister was able to make it after all. And it did her no harm. She felt better for the little exertion, and she had a good night. Only she thought it well to rest this afternoon, in anticipation of your visit, my dears."

Alas! Five minutes afterwards Miss Alethea made her appearance, and at the usual time, old Martha, the servant, brought in the little tray with the new cake and the two small plates, always handed to us, for fear of our dropping crumbs on the carpet.

It was horribler than ever! I have always thought, though Cynthia wouldn't allow it, that Great-cousin Alethea had been confused and had put in a double quantity of *the* spice,

whatever it was, that was the nastiest of all. Or else I found it more difficult to eat, through the hopes I had had of escaping it.

Any way, I just felt I could *not* swallow it, and while Cynthia was playing, Miss Bridget standing beside the piano and Miss Alethea leaning back in her stiff chair with her eyes closed—a thing I had never seen her do before—a fit of desperation came over me. I stuffed my piece of cake down between the end and the seat of the old chintz-covered sofa, as far as I could get it to go, putting the cushion in front of it for fear of its possibly showing. Why I did not put it into my pocket, which would have been much simpler, I really didn't know. I rather think I had promised Cynthia I would never try to do so again.^c

Soon after we went—nurse came for us a little sooner than usual, perhaps Martha had given her a hint to do so—and Miss Alethea was plainly not well.

How glad I was to get out of the house, but how wretched I began to feel as soon as we reached home. I felt as if I had done something really very naughty and deceitful, and I was so miserable that I grew cross and quarrelsome. Nurse thought I must be going to be ill, and she put me to bed early. Cynthia said nothing, but she knew me too well not to see that something was the matter.

In the middle of the night I woke up and began to cry, very quietly, but Cynthia heard me.

"What is the matter, Belle?" she said, in a very

solemn tone; "you have something on your mind."

When she spoke like that I could not stand out, and with a trembling voice I confessed what I had done.

She was very much shocked. She had most strict ideas about politeness, and about not hurting people's feelings.

"How *could* you do such a thing?" she said. "They are sure to find it first thing in the morning. What *will* they think? It will seem so ungrateful, as if we did not care for the gingerbread."

"Well I am sure we don't," I said, trying to brave it out. "But I don't think they'll find it. I put the worked cushion, with the roses on, right in front."

"You silly girl," said Cynthia. "Do you suppose the cushions and everything are not shaken out every day? Why, Miss Alethea dusts the drawing-room herself! I've heard her say so. Of course, they'll find it. And even if only Martha found it she would be sure to tell them. You will just have to beg their pardon *humbly*, Belle, and say——."

"What? What *can* I say?" I wailed.

"I don't know. You must say you don't like the taste of the spice, I suppose. Any way, you must beg their pardon *most* humbly. If you don't, I really don't think I'll ever speak to you again. I do feel so *ashamed* of you."

That was the worst of all. Before Cynthia's displeasure, my fear of the old great-cousins faded, and in my own mind, amid my sobs, I made a desperate resolution.

The next day was Sunday. We went to church with

nurse at half-past ten o'clock, but as we had breakfast early, there was always a good while between. Nurse and Cynthia were sitting quietly in our little parlour—Cynthia was reading aloud to nurse, I think. Now was my time. I got a piece of paper and a pencil, and wrote a little note to Cynthia, telling her I had gone to do what she said I must. This I pinned on to the pin-cushion where she would be sure to see it, and dragging on my jacket and hat as quickly as I could, off I set.

It was only a little way to the Parade, but long before I got there I was so out of breath that I could scarcely speak, and my legs were all trembling and shaking. No wonder that old Martha was startled when, managing at last to reach up to the knocker, I let it drop with a bang which made her hurry to open, disclosing to view my pale face.

"Dear, dear, I thought it was the doctor," she said. "What is the matter, Miss Belle? You can't have heard, surely?"

"Heard what?" I said. "I haven't heard anything, but I want very much to see Miss—Miss Bridget. It's something very particular." I felt I should have said "Miss Malliford," that was Cousin Alethea, as she was the elder, but I was much less afraid of Cousin Bridget.

"I don't know, Miss, if she'll be able to see you," said Martha, looking troubled. "Poor Miss Malliford isn't at all well. The doctor was here late last night and we're expecting him again. But please step in and I'll see."

She opened the drawing-room door. To my surprise Miss Bridget was already there—she had come downstairs while Martha and I were talking. She was looking about for something, and her back turned to me. But she heard me come in and thought I was Martha, who had already hurried off, not thinking she was there.

“I am looking everywhere for my sister's spectacles,” she said. “Have you seen them, Martha? It worries her not to have them by her.”

“It isn't Martha,” I said timidly. “It's me, Cousin Bridget. I'm so sorry Cousin Alethea is ill.”

And so I was, but I was only a very little girl after all, and my head was full of my own troubles. It didn't occur to me that the illness was anything serious.

Cousin Bridget turned at once.

“Belle,” she exclaimed, “and have you come to ask for dear Cousin Alethea? That was very pretty of you, my love, very pretty indeed. She will be pleased to hear it.”

Worse and worse! I could not accept this undeserved credit.

“I—we—we did not know she was ill, Cousin Bridget. I came about something else. I want to tell you——” and then I stopped. Oh, if she would but go out of the room for a moment, I could peep behind the sofa cushion, and *perhaps* the cake would be still there! The tiny drawing-room did not look as neat as usual, possibly it had not had its regular dusting and tidying. And *if* the cake had not been found,

surely I need not tell of my naughty deed! It would spare the Great-cousins' feelings, and perhaps Cynthia would think I had been punished enough. But Cousin Bridget was still hunting about for the spectacles. I grew nervous for fear she should look behind the sofa cushions. I felt myself getting more and more miserable.

"Cousin Bridget," I said at last, "I want to tell you that—yesterday I did something very nau——."

Then I burst into tears. I didn't know if she heard my words at all. I think not. The poor old lady was sadly upset. But she saw my tears and heard my sobs, and flew to comfort me, sad as she was herself.

"My sweet child, such a tender heart. We must hope for the best," she whispered brokenly as she kissed me. She thought it was all grief for grim old Cousin Alethea.

And before I could make up my mind to undeceive her, there came an interruption. Martha appeared at the door.

"If you please, Miss Bridget," she said, "Miss Malliford has heard who's here, and nothing will content her but Miss Belle must come up to see her."

Cousin Bridget looked at me doubtfully. I was still sobbing.

"Can you be calm, my love?" she said. "It would distress your dear cousin to see you crying. And she is a little light-headed. You must not be surprised if she does not speak quite like herself."

"I—I don't mind, if you like," I said. I did not quite

understand, but I was determined to be very polite and good.

So they took me upstairs to the room where the old, old lady lay, as white as her pillow, but with a gentle smile on her face. I had never seen Great-cousin Alethea look so sweet.

"Little Belle," she whispered. "Kiss me, my love. I am rather tired, but I shall be getting up directly. I must see about the gingerbread for those dear children, Martha. They do enjoy it; it is a pleasure to see."

I stooped and kissed her, and some tears—I think I was crying for a different reason now—fell on the soft wrinkled face.

"No, no, dear, don't cry," she whispered. "I am feeling so much better. And, oh yes, I remember now, I *did* make the gingerbread. I am so glad. They enjoyed it, Bridget, you said, that last time they came to see us?"

I could bear no more. I turned and rushed away. Cousin Bridget and Martha let me go. But as I passed the drawing-room door, I ran in; in another moment I had pulled away the cushion, and—yes, there it was! No one had found it, *they would never know.*

Cousin Alethea died that evening. And Cynthia was as glad and thankful as I myself that I had not been able to tell.

As it turned out, that Saturday proved to be our last visit to the little house in the Parade. Papa came to our Great-cousin's funeral, and took us home with him the next day. Poor Cousin Bridget lived a few months after her sister, and then she died too.

We never went back to our lodgings at Villamarina, for the very next spring papa bought a country-house of our own.

But not many years ago, Cynthia and I happened to be paying a visit not far from the small seaside town we remembered so well. And we drove over there. It looked just the same, the tiny house on the Parade in no way changed ; it was difficult to believe that if we knocked at the door Martha would not open it and show us into the prim drawing-room, with the Great-cousins waiting to receive us, and the dread certainty of the spiced gingerbread in the background.

But on our way home we stopped for a moment at the little old churchyard. And there in a quiet corner is a grave, on the headstone of which are engraved the names of "Alethea Malliford, aged 89," and of "Bridget Mary Malliford, her sister, aged 88."

"Oh Cynthia," I said, squeezing her hand tightly, "*are* you not glad they never knew?"

The Inquisitive Imp.

BY MARY HOLDSWORTH.

HE was the most inquisitive creature in the world, always poking his nose into this and into that, and was never happy unless he knew the ins-and-outs of everything that was going on around him. If he had only kept to himself what he found out, it would not have mattered so much, but that was what he could not do. It was like pouring water into a sieve to tell him anything, but with this notable difference—that only the same quantity of water that you put into a sieve can by any possibility run through; whereas the Imp always added at least twice as much to the story as was at first told him.

Originally he had been a handsome Imp—if you could call an Imp handsome—but through his insatiable curiosity he had by degrees lost most of his best features.

For instance, this was how he came to lose his tail: One evening he had hidden in the chimney of a neighbour's house to listen to something that was not intended for his ears, and he was so intent upon the tale, that with leaning

forward too much he lost his balance and fell down the chimney, and was caught by the tail before he could make his escape. So enraged was the neighbour at finding him eavesdropping, that he chopped off the Imp's tail, and ever afterwards kept it as a memento. You would naturally think that this severe lesson would have taught him wisdom; but oh dear no! nothing of the kind.

This was the way he came to lose his nose—a nice, long, pointed one, of which he was very proud, as it showed his aristocratic origin, he said.

One day he was regaling himself with jam, cake, etc., in a friend's cupboard, when two ladies entered and began a most interesting conversation. Our friend the Imp was a great fop, you must know, and did not like to be seen with his mouth all smeared with jam—for he had left his pocket-handkerchief at home in the pocket of his great coat, which was hanging up in the hall; so he quietly pulled to, without quite closing, the door of the cupboard where he was hiding. After a while the ladies became very excited over the subject of their conversation, and drew their chairs closer together, whispering eagerly to each other. Our friend the Imp was so anxious to hear what they were saying, that he poked his nose outside the cupboard door. Presently, one of the ladies thought she felt a draught from that cupboard, so she just gave it a push, without turning round, and it shut with a bang, squeezing the poor Imp's beautiful aristocratic nose to a jelly. He had to wear a wax one after that. You would

think that now surely he would listen no more to what was not intended for his ears—which only shows how little you know his character.

I told you before that the Imp had been handsome once—and he thought himself so now, too; but there is one thing that imps have in common with donkeys, which is not pretty—and that is long ears. Still, as the Imp himself said, and I believe the wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood” made the same remark—long ears are all the better for hearing with; so they have their use, especially if you happen to be of an inquisitive nature.

It happened one day that there was a grand review, to which, of course, the Imp must needs go, for he never liked to miss anything. The soldiers were advancing with bayonets fixed, and the Imp was so eagerly craning his neck to watch a man who had got a fly in his eye and could not get it out, that he forgot to move out of the way, and of course, the soldiers were obliged to move in a straight line, when—think of it!—off went one of his long ears, shaved off by one of the bayonets: and lucky it was for him that he got off with the loss of only one ear, when he might have lost his life; but this did not greatly add to the beauty of his appearance, as it gave him rather a lop-sided look.

To continue our woful tale, he was one day peeping through a keyhole, when a mischievous boy, who, to be sure, did not know that he was there, poked a stick through, which went right into the Imp's eye, and put

it out for ever; so that up to the time of which we are speaking, he was tailless, noseless, and had but one ear and one eye; but he was just as inquisitive as ever: nothing, it seems, could cure him.

One day there was a great fuss and excitement in town; the Wild Beast Show was coming, and of course the Imp, dressed in his best, with an eye-glass in one eye and a glass eye in the other, a new wax nose and ditto ear, went like all the world to see the show. He was much interested in the various animals, and also in the lady lion tamer. Nothing would please him but that he must do as she did, and put his head in the lion's mouth. The lordly lion did not like it at all, but was too generous to hurt him much, so he just contented himself with crunching his other ear. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good, for the Imp after that time had a new pair of much smaller ears put on, of which he was very proud. But the troubles of that day were not yet over, for in an unlucky moment he saw some monkeys eating nuts. Now the Imp was very fond of nuts, and just by way of a joke, you know, thought he would take the nuts from the monkeys and eat them himself. No sooner said than done. So he just pushed one of his long arms through the bars of the cage to take a handful, and was in the act of withdrawing it—but being of a greedy disposition, he got his hand so full that he could not squeeze it back again through the bars in time—when the monkeys, with a loud chattering of indignation, seized the unfortunate Imp by the arm and

pulled and wrenched at it until they pulled it off, and the poor Imp had to go home a sorry figure, with only one ear, and that an artificial one, and one arm. He had to get a cork one to supply its place after that.

He was rather quiet for a little while after this double misfortune, but the ruling passion in him was too strong to be entirely overcome.

One day he went to the Meet, and very nice he looked, too, got up in pink, like all the world; his two new wax ears, wax nose, eyes as before, and cork arm created quite a sensation, which he thought was due to his elegant appearance (especially the eye-glass, of which he was very proud). He was riding a very quiet little gray mare; but he greatly admired a very handsome, but vicious-looking bay, ridden by the Master of the Hounds. While the Master had dismounted for a moment, and had his back turned, nothing would suit the Imp but that he must mount it. "Now or never," said he to himself, and in spite of the remonstrances of the groom, he would and did mount. No sooner did the gallant steed feel the grip of the reins, than just turning his eyes round the corner to see what sort of a thing he had got upon his back (like Gilpin's renowned charger), he commenced plunging and rearing most violently, and threw the poor Imp right over his head, where he lay in a senseless heap on the ground with one of his legs broken.

I did not see anything of him for a long time after that, but when I did see him, he had two cork arms, two cork

legs, two wax ears, a wax nose, and a glass eye ; and he was just as inquisitive as ever, if not a trifle more so.

Very likely there is nothing at all left of him by this time ; but if there is, you may be quite sure that as long as a thread of him remains he is still the Inquisitive Imp.

The Wreckers of Pendarven.

BY G. A. HENTY.

THE coast of Cornwall had a bad reputation among sailors a century back; not only were they naturally formidable and dangerous, but mariners cast upon them could expect but little aid, the inhabitants viewing all that came on shore as their natural spoil, and devoting their efforts to collecting plunder rather than saving life. It was generally believed that many an unfortunate, who had managed to reach the shore alive, had been murdered for the sake of his valuables; and it was certain that vessels had been lured to their destruction by false lights exhibited among rocks.

Pendarven was a village standing a mile away from the edge of the cliffs, at no great distance from the Lizard; at the head of a cove running up towards it was a cluster of fishermen's huts, known by the name of Little Pendarven. The Rector of the parish, the Rev. Richard Linton, had on his first coming been regarded with dislike and suspicion by his parishioners as being a foreigner, that is one not a native of the County. In time, however, they came to overlook this,

and grew to like him. He was an active, powerful man, with a cheery voice and manner. He owed his present position to the fact that at Oxford he had saved the life of young Tregennis, the son of the Tregennis who owned miles of land in that neighbourhood; the young fellow's boat had capsized, he was unable to swim, and would have been drowned had not Linton, who was walking along the bank, thrown off his coat, plunged in, and brought him to shore. As soon as he was ordained, Mr. Tregennis offered him the living of Pendarven, together with those of Pengarth and Polpeno which adjoined it, the united stipends amounting to an income that enabled him to keep a curate who took charge of the two outlying parishes.

In due course Richard Linton* married a young lady of his native County, Warwick, and had two sons and a daughter. The life would have been a dull one, for there was but little society and his parochial duties were by no means heavy, but the clergyman was fond of field sports—shot, fished, and, when there was an opportunity, hunted. He kept a boat down at the cove, and in fine weather was often out sailing and fishing. He educated his children, and as soon as they were old enough, they accompanied him in his expeditions ashore and afloat, learned to sail a boat, to catch a fish with rod or sea-line, and to bring down a bird. His wife occasionally protested against Mabel sharing in all the boys' exercises, but he would laugh off her objections.

"She will be none the worse for it, my dear; if she had

girl companions of her own age it would be different, but it is far better for her to be in the open air gaining strength and health than to be sitting with you sewing. You yourself enjoy sailing, and would enjoy it still more if you had been taught as a girl to manage a boat, and though I suppose she will not have much opportunity for shooting or fishing when she gets to be a woman, they afford pleasure and amusement to her now, and the knowledge how to use a gun and a rod will certainly do her no harm."

So things went on until the twins, Arthur and Harold, were nearly sixteen, while Mabel was a year younger. They were as active and healthy young people as could be desired. Their education had been precisely similar, and Mabel could construe Latin or solve a problem as well as her brothers, and come in as fresh after a long day's tramp over moor and hill.

The Rev. Richard Lintoff had but one source of difference with his parishioners; he was opposed tooth and nail to smuggling, protesting against it not so much on the ground of its lawlessness, but because it was the means by which cheap spirits were brought within the reach of all, and because men came to rely upon the gains of this traffic, and so became indisposed to honest labour.

As to wrecking, his denunciations of the practice were unsparing. He told his parishioners from the pulpit that robbery of those whom fate had cast on their shores was a custom that would disgrace savages, and that it was a

mockery for those who thus violated the laws of hospitality to come to a place of worship and ask for a blessing on their daily work. His words angered, but in no way convinced his hearers. They looked upon the harvest of the sea as being as legitimately their property as that which they gathered from their fields. It had always been the custom of their fathers to appropriate everything that was cast ashore, and they had come to regard a wreck as a special gift of Providence. The Rector was, however, a masterful man. At his first coming he had more than once taken off his coat and administered tremendous punishment to village bullies who had ill-treated their wives, or, emboldened by liquor, addressed scoffing words to him, and the only consequence of his preaching was that those at the Rectory were always the last to hear of a wreck, for the shore was generally pretty well cleared before he made his appearance there.

Of late, however, the boys were generally on the cliffs in wild weather, and several times vessels seen to be driving towards the shore, had been boarded and brought with safety into the little cove; for when it came to the point the fishermen always yielded to the stirring exhortations of their clergyman, and would launch a boat, however great the danger, while he took the helm and his two boys rowed bow oars.

"There is no standing against the parson," they would say in excuse for themselves afterwards. "He comes down, and

he says, 'Now then, lads, what are you standing here for while there are fellow-creatures in danger ; now then, who is coming with me ; put your shoulders to the boats, lads, and let us have her down ; now then, all together, I know there is not a coward in Little Pendarven. Quick, lads, or the Lieutenant will be getting his coastguard boat out, and you don't want to be beaten by him, I suppose.'"

The Lieutenant was a great chum of the parson and his children, and was by far the most frequent guest at the Rectory. He had seen service in all parts of the world, had fought under Nelson and Jarvis, and had gone through dangers and perils of all kinds, but having no interest he had, after seeing young men innumerable pass over his head, been glad to settle down in command of the little station at Pendarven, where he was regarded by the population in general as their natural enemy, a feeling that had been heightened by the activity he displayed, and by the capture of more than one venture that had just been landed.

That winter the Rev. Richard Linton had taken a holiday, the first for many years, and had gone with his wife to pay a visit to their relations in Warwickshire, leaving the charge of the three parishes to his Curate, a quiet, middle-aged man, who arranged to conduct the service every Sunday morning at Pendarven, and to hold an afternoon service alternately at the outlying parishes.

The weather changed for the worst shortly after the

Rector's departure, and the wind was blowing strongly one evening, when Arthur said, "What do you say to going down to the cliffs, Harold? There was a vessel in the offing when I was there this afternoon, she seemed to be making bad weather of it, and as the wind is freshening, it is likely enough she may be driven into the bay to-night; she ought to have been headed off this afternoon, and I should say the captain could not have known much of the coast or he would not have held on. The tide will have changed at eight o'clock, and there is always a set into the bay with the wind in this quarter."

"They ought to have been able to work out again, even if they did get under the cliffs," Harold said, "but you know that at last wreck there was, the men who were brought off with the life line declared that there was a bright light on the cliffs, and they took it for the beacon on the head. You know how angry father was about it. He would not believe any of the men would be guilty of such a thing, but there is that set that we know are in league with the smugglers, old Tremaine, Purvis, Trehannock, and five or six others who would, I am sure, be up to any mischief. I think they are worse than any of the men down at the cove; the fishermen, being themselves often exposed to danger in storms, can't help having a fellow feeling for sailors, but these Pendarven men who, as far as one can see, never do a stroke of work, but pass all their time at public-houses, would be capable of anything."

"Yes, I am quite ready to go with you."

"And, of course, I shall go too," Mabel said.

"It is a rough night, Mabel."

"As if I cared for that," she said scornfully, "I have got my oil-skin coat, and with a hood over my head I don't care a fig for the rain."

"We will take a couple of those signal rockets father had down from Plymouth last month," Arthur said, "they may be of use."

When they sallied out the wind was blowing strongly, with a driving rain.

"I think you are foolish to go, Mabel," Harold grumbled, but neither of the boys thought of telling her to stay behind, for she was completely one of themselves, and the fact of her being a girl was never taken into consideration except when they went off to a wreck, and then only because her strength was insufficient to manage an oar in a heavy sea. When within a quarter of a mile of the cliffs the boom of a gun came to their ears.

"She can't be very far out by the sound," Harold said, as they broke into a run. Again and again, at intervals of a minute, the boom of a gun came to their ears; they listened for it again, but it was not repeated.

"That is queer," Arthur said; "by the sound she must be still half a mile out. What should they stop firing for?" The night was a dark one, and when they reached the end of the cliff, they could see nothing save the white heads of

the waves and a broad band of foam far below them, where the waves broke with fury against the foot of the cliffs, sending the spray so high up that its saltness could be tasted on their lips as it mingled with the rain.

"I wish they would fire again," Arthur shouted, "then we should be able to see where they are; as it is, it is too thick to make them out till they are almost on the rocks. Look, Harold, what is that light?"

Away to the left there was a glare on the mist: the light from which it came was not visible to them, but it would be seen from the sea.

"Those scoundrels must have shown a light to lure them in," Harold exclaimed; "that accounts for the guns having ceased, the captain will think it is the beacon on the head, and will shape his course east thinking he is past the danger, and will go ashore half a mile this side of the head. What is to be done, Arthur?"

"We must put out the light," Arthur replied, "there is no doubt about that. Look here, Mabel, do you go along the cliff as hard as you can. Run towards the cove, you are sure to find two or three coastguardsmen on the look-out along the cliff; they will have seen the vessel before it became dark. Tell them to come on here at full speed. The light is evidently in that little cleft that runs half-way down the cliffs. Keep on until you get to the station, you are most likely to find Lieutenant there, bring him on at once with all the men he has got. There, don't stop to talk; be off as quick as

you can, and be sure and don't get too near the edge of the cliffs."

Without a moment's hesitation Mabel started, throwing off her oil-skin cloak to be able to run the faster. She knew that there was danger to the boys in the plan they were about to carry out, and would gladly have shared it with them, but felt that she could be of little aid to them, and would be of far greater service by sending help as soon as possible. As soon as she was gone the boys hurried in the direction of the light.

"It is the mist that shews it," Arthur said, "the fellows did not think of that, if it hadn't been raining no one here on the cliff would be able to see it; now what do you think we had better do?"

"I should say we had better get as close to them as we can, then strike a light on our tinder box, and send up the two rockets; father said the stars gave a great light, and I should think those on board the ship would be able to make out the coast by it. We shall see how many fellows there are by the light; if there are only two of them, we will rush down, knock over the light, and give the men a push that will send them rolling down a long way before they can bring up against the bushes, that will give us time to make off."

They made their way cautiously down the break in the cliff, till, some ten feet below them, they saw the light. It was a fire lighted in a small iron cresset. On this a man

was pouring oil, causing a bright flame to leap high up. A screen of canvas had been erected behind it at the only spot from which a glimpse of the fire could be obtained by anyone passing along the cliff.

Fearing that, strongly as the wind was blowing, the sharp click of the flint and steel might catch the wreckers' ears, the boys ascended the slope a short distance.

"I could only make out the one man, Harold," Arthur said, "but I should think there must be more than one there."

"Sure to be," Harold agreed; "they would know it was possible that the light might be seen, and would certainly have two or three fellows gathered there in case they should be discovered. I think the best plan will be for you to manage the rockets. I will steal down close to them, and the moment the rockets go up I will rush in and throw the fire over. I am sure to be able to do that, for the sudden rush of the rockets will scare them."

"I will put the tinder to the touch-paper, and as soon as I see it is alight will come down and join you."

"Well, make haste, Arthur, there is no time to be lost if we are to save the ship."

As he returned to his place a short distance from the fire, Harold saw that the man who was feeding it had been joined by another; they were pointing seawards and he had no doubt they had caught sight of the ship they were luring to destruction. Stooping down he felt among the rocks and

picked up two pieces of stone about the size of his fists. A minute later Arthur joined him.

"They are both lighted, Harold!"

"All right, here is a stone; get ready for the rush. I will kick the fire over and take the fellow to the right, you take the one to the left."

They stood eagerly waiting until there was a sudden roar behind them, followed instantly by a second as the two rockets flew up. With a shout of surprise the men at the fire turned round. They had scarcely done so when two figures sprang down in the darkness, the fire was knocked over and one of the men pitched headlong after it, while the other was struck down by a heavy blow from a stone. Then two reports high overhead were heard, and a moment later the place was lit up by the light of the bright stars of the signal rockets.

"There is the ship!" Arthur exclaimed. "She is safe yet. The captain must see his danger, and will have time to get on to the other tack and make out."

His words were cut short as he was felled by a sudden blow. Harold turned round and saw by the light of the still glowing coals that they were attacked by two men who had been lying down unperceived among the rocks. He sprang instantly upon the one who had just felled his brother, and by the suddenness of the spring bore him to the ground. There they rolled over and over each other, engaged in a fierce struggle, Harold endeavouring to break from the

other's grasp and rise to his feet, while the man shouted to his comrade to finish his opponent. "Knock him on the head, Bill, or cut his throat."

"It's all very well," the other muttered, as he leant over them; "you hold him still for a minute and I will soon do for him, but how am I to find out which is which in the dark as long as you keep on twisting about?"

Harold's opponent presently got above him and by superior weight and strength pinned him down.

"Now I have got him under, Bill, stick your knife into him." Harold thought that his last moment had come, when close above he heard Mabel's voice shouting, "Come along, Lieutenant, post your men to cut off their retreat, bring some of them on here;" and a hoarse voice shouted, "Ay, ay, we will have them. Come on, my lads, and shew no mercy to the scoundrels."

With an oath the man who was free sprang away among the rocks, the other made a desperate effort to shake off Harold's grasp, but was unable to do so.

"Where are you, boys?" Mabel cried.

"Here I am, Mabel; I have got hold of one of the fellows."

In an instant a man sprang down. "Which is you, sir?" he asked, as he stooped over them.

"I am underneath." In a moment the hilt of the seaman's cutlass fell on the smuggler's head, and the man rolled over senseless. The coastguard assisted Harold to his feet, and

stooping over the wrecker drew a brace of pistols from his belt.

"Take these, sir, there may be some more of them about."

"Where is Arthur, Harold?"

"He is down close to where you are standing, Mabel; this fellow knocked him down with his cudgel."

"Are there any more of them, sir?" the coastguardsman asked Harold, as Mabel stooped over Arthur.

"There were two more of them besides that fellow who has got away. One I pushed down the cliff when I upset the fire, the other is lying somewhere beyond my brother; I think Arthur knocked him over with a stone."

"Well, sir, you see to your brother, I will fasten the hands of the fellow I gave a clip on the head to, he will soon be coming round; then I will look to the other one."

"Where is the Lieutenant and the rest of the men?"

"Lor! there aint none of them here but me," the coast-guard said with a laugh, "that was just a bit of make believe."

"Perhaps the fellow who got away will be bringing some others upon us," Harold said, as he lifted Arthur into a sitting position.

"Not much chance of that, he bolted up the gap on the other side and will take the news that we are all here; but I don't expect he will find them waiting, for the rockets will have told them that things have gone wrong, and they will know that the craft will have escaped, and will hurry

off to their homes, without waiting a minute, you may be sure."

By the time the sailor and the coastguardsman had securely bound the two wreckers, Arthur had recovered consciousness, but was still faint and giddy.

"Look here, Master Linton," the coastguardsman said, as he rejoined them; "the best thing to do will be for you and your sister to make your way as quickly as you can to the station and tell the Lieutenant what has happened, and get him to come on with eight men and some stretchers. Your brother will be all right with me; if that fellow down below there should come up, I can tackle him easy enough, but I expect he got pretty badly hurt, if he hasn't broken his skull. You had better take those pistols with you, I have got my own, and there is another brace of that other fellow's; your brother will soon be able to use them, if there should be any need for it, which I don't think is likely."

"Come along, Mabel," Harold said, "the sooner we are off the sooner we shall be back." Just as they reached the top of the cliff the moon broke out for a moment through the hurrying clouds, and Mabel uttered an exclamation of pleasure as looking seawards she saw the barque laying her course out of the bay.

"That is all right," Harold said, "we have saved some lives anyhow by our work to-night, Mabel, but how is it that you are back so soon?"

"I never intended to go far," she said. "I knew that it

would be no use at all my going to the station, for if there was a fight here, it would be over long before I could get half-way. I wanted to tell you I would come back again with the first coastguard I met, but you would not let me speak, and every moment was of importance if you were to warn the ship in time. Luckily I came upon Thompson before I had gone a quarter of a mile. I told him what had happened, and we started back again as hard as we could run, and were close by when the rockets went up. I told him that I would shout as if the Lieutenant and the whole party were here, and as soon as we got down close to where I knew the fire had been I called out, and he shouted in the same way."

"It saved my life, Mabel; the fellow who got away would have stabbed me in another minute, it was only because he could not find out which was which that he hadn't done it before. The man who had hold of me had just pinned me down, and I was expecting death every moment when I heard your voice."

"Stop a moment, Harold," she cried weakly, "I feel so strange."

"It is all right," he said, catching her arm, "come along, you have done splendidly, and you must keep up until we get to the station anyhow; some of those fellows may come back and we must send assistance." The thought again nerved the girl, who had indeed been very near fainting at the thought of the imminence of Harold's danger, and after a quarter of an hour's hard run they reached the station.

* The Lieutenant did not lose a moment when he heard what had happened, but started with eight men, with stretchers and lanterns, to the scene of the encounter. Harold wanted Mabel to remain at the station till their return, but this she would not hear of. On their arrival at the gap they found that nothing had happened in their absence. Four of the men with lanterns at once went down the gap and found the man who had been pushed down, lying there badly cut and bruised and with a broken arm. The three prisoners were carried to the station, and Arthur, after being helped up to the top of the cliff, declared himself able to walk home, but the Lieutenant insisted on sending two of his men to assist him on the way.

When the Assizes came round, the three prisoners were sentenced to penal servitude for life, for endeavouring to decoy a vessel on to the rocks by false lights. Five or six of the roughest characters in Pendarven had been missing from their homes since the night of the fray, and the effect was a serious blow not only to wrecking but to smuggling in the district.

As soon as the trial was over, Mr. Linton sent the two boys to their friends in Warwickshire, where they went to school for a year, as he thought it better that they should be away until any feeling excited among the relatives of the men who had been punished for their misdeeds should have died out. When they returned home it was but for a short stay, as their friends had obtained for them com-

missions in the army, and it was not until some ten years later that they returned home on leave, after the conclusion of the Peninsular Campaign and the overthrow of Napoleon.

• Their sister had been long since married to the son of the Mr. Tregennis who was patron of the living of Pendarven. Her husband's interest in her had first been excited by the evidence she had given at the trial of the wreckers, and he was always ready to aver that she made none the worse a wife for having been brought up as a boy, and being able to shoot, fish, and steer a boat as well as her brothers.

How Grandmère came for Jeanne- Margot.

A STORY OF THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN.

BY FRANCES CLARE,
AUTHOR OF "A CHILD'S PILGRIMAGE."

(Suggested by Rossetti's Picture, "The Boat of Love.")

CHAPTER I.

IT is a chill November day, during that awful struggle known as the Franco-Prussian War, and a strong north-easter blows the last leaves from the apple trees in the great fruit orchards of Normandy, and bends the silver poplars which stand near Maître Chatrain's mill in a small village a few leagues from Rouen. In one of the rooms of the mill house lies Dame Margot, the dead miller's aged mother, sick unto death, and by her side there stands a girl of fourteen, with a brown oval face and soft dark eyes, which make you think of beautiful brown pansies.

Yes, of pansies with the dew on them, for as she looks on the kind old wrinkled face which lies so calmly on its pillow, tears fill the poor child's eyes, though she will not

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let them fall ; but Grandmère, who knows everything, knows of the unshed tears, though her own observant eyes are growing ever dimmer, and she puts out her work-worn hand and draws Jeanne Margot close to her as if she were a little child.

"Listen to me, my poor little one," says the aged voice tenderly ; "I am about to take a long journey, and there are a few words I must say to thee before I set out. Dost understand me, my darling ?"

"Yes, yes, dear Grandmère, yes ! You are going to the good God, as father and mother went. Ask Him to take me too, Grandmère ! Oh, ask Him to take me too !"

"Hush ! hush ! calm thyself," says the tender voice, quite firmly. "He to Whom I am going sees not with thy eyes or with mine. He may see something for you to do, my dearest, and so you cannot die till you have done it. Now I may be wrong, but I think that you will live to be Alain's guardian angel. He is older than you by many years, but that matters little—for he is far younger than you in wisdom, and these dimming eyes of mine see him in danger, though what that danger may be I cannot tell."

"Yes ! Alain is like to run into danger, he is so brave," says Jeanne Margot, "he ought to have been a soldier, instead of a miller. Why, look you, he said but yesterday that he himself, alone and unaided, could fight a column of Uhlans. Truly, he is a hero."

"He is rash, but not as brave as you, my lamb," says

Dame Margot. "Really brave men are always ready to seal their acts with their lives if needful, and your brother fears death as burnt children dread the fire. Yet do I love him greatly—he was put into my arms by your mother, just one day after I'd buried my good man, and when they told me that the new-born babe bore *his* name, Alain, I shed some blessed tears, and my cross felt lightened."

"Where is your brother now, child? Tell me."

"Gone into Rouen with some flour, Grandmère. It is thought that the Prussians have made a detour, and so will not enter the city. Still the bakers are buying up meal and corn as fast as they can buy, and so Alain has gone to sell ours. He will soon be back though, Grandmère, for he can't bear to be long away from *you*. And besides, there is danger in crossing our river now, the water's so high, and Pierrot is not as good and careful a ferryman as you say that Grandpère was."

"Ah! and I say truly," replies Dame Margot, eagerly. "Never was the ferry-boat rowed so skilfully as when my man rowed it; he could bring the boat across in safety, when the stream was deepest and the night was darkest. Ah, well! I've soon to cross a stream deeper than our river at its deepest, and it may be that the good God will give me light and send my Alain to help me to cross it."

"Jeanne, my cherished one, give Grandmère the palm branch which was given to her last Palm Sunday, and then let her rest till brother Alain comes home."

Gently and tearfully Jeanne Margot takes the withered spray from its place above Grandmère's head and lays it on her breast, then a faint, sweet smile steals over the dear old face, the work-worn hands are folded together as humbly and meekly as those of a little child, who asks God to take care of and bless it at its mother's knees. And when young Alain Chatrain comes back to the mill-house at midnight with the information that he has sold his flour, that the Prussians *are* coming their way, and that they must forthwith seek shelter in Rouen, with Uncle Léon, the Antiquary, he finds that Grandmère has fallen asleep with the palm on her breast, and he knows that her slumber is so deep and peaceful that she would not awake even if the dreaded invaders were in reality attacking her native village; for He Who giveth His beloved sleep has bestowed this last best gift on His faithful servant.

But the eyes of the child to whom she was mother, grandmother, guardian, guide, and friend, are swollen and painful with the shedding of many tears, for she only sees the worn-out frame lying still, *very* still, on its little bed. She does not, she cannot, see an angelic form come down the misty river which divides our world from the Paradise of God, because the eyes of Jeanne Margot, being eyes of the body, cannot see beyond the little room in which dear dead Grandmère lies.

No, Jeanne Margot does not see these things, she does not see the boat of love in which Grandmère crosses the dark

river, nor see the joyous light on her face as she recognizes him who guides the boat, nor can poor Jeanne hear that well-loved, tender voice say, "Blessed be God for sending thee to me, Alain," neither does she hear the reply, "Yea, blessed be God for sending me to thee, Marguérite."

For the ears of Jeanne Margot are dull, and she only knows that when she calls with weeping on the dear dead woman, she (for the first time in all her life) meets with no loving, kind reply.

CHAPTER II.

It is the ninth day of December, and the Germans are in occupation of Rouen, and are quartered on the sorely reluctant inhabitants, one of whom is Monsieur Léon Chatrain, the uncle of Jeanné Margot and of her brother Alain; but though he is French to the backbone, he is an antiquarian as well as a Frenchman, and he can smile amidst his troubles, because, as he remarks to Jeanne, the Prussians certainly require food and clothes, arms and horses, but they do not want the old coins, his bronzes, curios, or his time-worn manuscripts and books which are so dear to the good old antiquary, and they treat himself and his niece with courtesy and respect. This is a source of comfort to them, for rash Alain has justified his dead grandmother's prediction and has become a thorn in the sides of both. He has said

good-bye to any form of work, he has become a patriot whose patriotism consists much more in long speeches than in deeds; he is absent from his home for hours together, and when he returns to it he is by turns moody and fiercely excited, for the old Alain, the Alain who used to grind the corn in the mill, is no more, and a new Alain has arisen in his place, an Alain about whose doings the antiquary and his niece are perpetually troubled.

Never since they have taken refuge in Rouen has Jeanne Margot been more troubled concerning her brother than she is on that ninth of December, for Alain quitted the house near the Palais de Justice at sunrise, vowing vengeance against the enemy, and she, with prophetic foresight, feels assured that he has committed some foolish and dangerous deed. The long gilt hands of the Louis Quatorze Clock, in the curio dealer's shop, tell off minute after minute, hour after hour, and still there comes no Alain, but at last, alas, there comes news of him instead. Into the shop comes the young Prussian Officer, who is quartered on them, and Jeanne Margot, who is standing watching and waiting behind the counter, feels troubled, for there is an expression of concern on Lieutenant Von Grieshaber's blonde face as he hands her a printed notice. "Fräulein," says he, "I mean Mademoiselle, read this." This is a printed proclamation which has been issued by a Prefect appointed by the Conquerors to the inhabitants of the Seine Inférieure, and it briefly, in military parlance, tells them what they may not

do, and also what pains and penalties they incur if they do aught displeasing to the army of occupation ; but the clause of the proclamation to which the young Lieutenant draws the anxious girl's notice is as under—

“Moreover, every individual who destroys a bridge, a canal, a road, a railway, or a telegraph line, will be tried by a Council of War, and sentenced to death.

“THE PREFECT, H. CRAMER.”

“Have you read ?” asks the Officer, and Jeanne says, “But certainly, Monsieur, still I cannot see what this has to do with either myself or Uncle Léon, or ——” she is about to add “Alain” when a terrible doubt which has lodged in her heart takes possession of her ‘and stops further utterance.

“I regret,” says the friendly soldier, gravely, “I deeply regret to say that this clause in the proclamation concerns all within this house, inasmuch as a member of it, named Alain Chatrain, has been detected in the act of cutting a telegraph wire, and has, therefore, been sentenced to death.”

“Has therefore been sentenced to death !” There comes a sharp pain at Jeanne's loving and faithful heart, and she cannot believe that she has heard aright.

“It is impossible,” she says, “that our Alain, Grandmère's Alain, is condemned to die. You must surely be mistaken, Monsieur. Oh, say, say quickly, that you are.”

“That I would gladly do if I could,” is the grave reply, “but my bad news is true. I myself saw the young man brought to the General's quarters by two mounted Uhlans,

and knew him, Fräulein, for your misguided brother. When the Council of War was over, I ventured to speak a word on his behalf to my Commanding Officer and others in authority, but it was all in vain. He dies to-morrow morning, shortly after sunrise; but be comforted, Mademoiselle. We must all die some day—it is the fate of mortals and the fortune of war. We must all, like grains of wheat, fall into the ground; what matter if it be a little sooner or a little later. It is your brother's turn to face death now; Ulrich Von Grieshaber's may come in a few weeks' time."

In this fashion does the kindly German try to console the young girl, for whom he now feels a deep compassion, as he has always felt a sincere regard, because she is as pretty and as modest as one of his own King Wilhelm's favourite corn flowers. But pity and philosophy are both alike thrown away on Jeanné Margot, who only realizes the fact that Alain's blue Norman eyes will look their last on things earthly to-day, if he cannot by any means whatsoever be saved; and saved, if possible, he must be, and by her. Even as these thoughts pass through her brain, the child mechanically dons her out-door wearing apparel, and passes out into the streets. As in a dream, she goes through the Market Place, in which groups of discontented citizens are grumbling about the Prussians and their requisitions, and when she hears Monsieur Marlott, the bootmaker, tell Monsieur Briand, the baker, that he had rather be shot than make the invaders' boots, she smiles a sad smile, and middle-

aged, grey-bearded Paul Marlott appears to her like a school-boy grumbling over his tasks, for great sorrows kill small cares, and Jeanne Margot's sorrow is great indeed.

On and on, still as in a dream, goes the dark-eyed child, and at last she reaches the Bishop's Palace, in which the General in command has taken up his quarters. Once, not so very long ago, Jeanne Margot would have thought it passing strange to see a helmeted soldier outside those doors, but the world has changed within the last few hours, and she has changed with it, so that nothing seems strange or unnatural, for the soul which is dominated by fear is surprised at nothing.

Then mechanically, as if walking in sleep, she goes up to the sentry and asks to speak with Monsieur, the General in command of the forces.

"Impossible, my little Fräulein," says the soldier not unkindly, "the General is taking counsel with the members of his staff, and can give audience to no one."

Deep sobs shake the slight frame, and tears fall like rain from the velvet eyes.

"What's amiss, little Fräulein? What ails you?" says the big sentinel, in a moved tone of voice.

"Alain, my brother, is going to be killed; Alain, my brother, is going to be shot," replies the quivering young voice slowly.

"Alain! Alain!" mutters the sentry, "now who in the name of good fortune is Alain, and what has he done, eh?"

"He cut a telegraph wire, Monsieur, and must die for it, it seems."

"Ah! now I remember," says the soldier, quickly. "He is the young man who cut through one of the most important lines of communication; the young man who threw his cap into the air, and cried, 'I'm glad I did it, I'd do it over again,' when we took him prisoner, and then hung down his head, muttering, 'Alas, alas, poor Margot!'"

"Are *you* Margot, my Fräulein?"

"Yes, I am Margot. I am his sister," is the sad reply, "and I would give my life for his, Monsieur—yes, I'd give it very gladly, for I miss Grandmère every day, and I *couldn't* be sorry to go to *her*." •

The eyes of the soldier look pityingly on her, and his voice takes a gentle tone as he says, "God pity thee, poor little one. You are young, but we all have a cross to carry. The bread which sorrow kneads is apt to stick in our throats, but we all have to swallow it some time in our lives. I've a wife and three little lads in the fatherland, who are always thinking of me, I know, as they eat their sauer-kraut; but, look you, I may never see them again; I may fall, as so many have fallen, on a battlefield; but 'tis no use grieving about it, I must choke down the lumpy bread, and bear my burden as well as I can, and you, my poor child, must needs do the same. Go home now and dry your tears, for nothing can save your brother, nothing!"

Then the soldier resumes his regular pacing up and down

in front of the Episcopal Palace, and Jeanne Margot turns to go home. She goes through the streets of the quaint old city, and at last she comes to that splendid house of prayer which is known as the Cathedral. "I will go in here," says the child to herself, "and ask the good God to tell me what to do;" so she pushes aside the curtain, and soon finds herself inside the dim, solemn Temple, from which wars and rumours of wars are shut out. Her head is burning and her heart is throbbing painfully, her mouth is parched with anguish, and her whole body aches as if it had been beaten with many rods.

But when she kneels down by a tall wooden chair in a dim side chapel she feels calmer, and reverently she lifts up her heart to the eternal and compassionate God—"Help me, Father in Heaven," alike say the voice of the soul and the voice of the lips. "Help me to save our Alain. Grandmère is with Thee, and I am all alone; but help, oh help me to save Alain."

Then she lays her head on the topmost rail of the white wooden chair and waits for an answer to her prayer, an answer which she is very sure will come, though none of the blessed dead stand beside her, and no fair angelic visitant comes gliding to her down the long, dim aisle. And lo, a message comes on a sudden to the kneeling child in a way which is God's way, and therefore of necessity different from ours.

Open on the seat of the chair lies a Book of Devotions.

which some worshipper has forgotten. The picture, which serves as a book-marker in this devotional volume, is a little lace-bordered, black-and-white print of Simon of Cyrene, bearing his Master's cross; and when Jeanne Margot perceives this she feels that her prayer has been answered, that a message has been sent to her, for she all at once knows perfectly well what to do. She will bear Alain's cross, she will meet his fate for him, she will make of her body a living shield, she will die for Grandmere's Alain, and then the Prussians will relent, and Grandmère will come for her and take her to herself, and they twain will be happy together in some glad and heavenly fashion, even as they were in dear old Chatrain's mill.

CHAPTER III.

On a frozen field just outside Rouen stand a line of German soldiers, and facing them is the kneeling, blindfolded figure of a young man in civilian's dress. Now and again he shivers as if from cold, and sometimes his pale lips part, and he murmurs, "Jeanne Margot! poor, poor little Jeanne!" Then he shudders again, as well he may, not only because of the raw cold air, but in dread of the fate which in a few moments awaits him. The sun hangs like a fiery ball in the frosty sky, and the gunboats in the river close by are but dimly seen through the frosty mist which veils them. Every

minute of his short span of life is worth a king's ransom to the terrified culprit, who kneels tremblingly on the frosted grass facing the carbines, which he feels are levelled at him although he cannot see them; too well he knows that the unseen death draws nearer, and knows also that nothing now can save him, unless, indeed, a miracle is wrought on his behalf.

Then, behold, a miracle is wrought—wrought by love, simple human love, which a greater and divine love helps to do its work—for just as the signal to fire was about to be given, a small grey-clad figure which has been unperceived by the firing party, springs forward in front of the prisoner, and then (though neither shot nor anything else has touched her) she falls prone upon the ground. The men look questioningly at one another as their officer steps up to the child, but before he can reach her the doctor is kneeling beside the little prostrate form. He lays his hand on the heart, but its anxious throbbing is for ever stilled; then he takes the slender wrist, but no pulse beats beneath his skilful fingers, nor does the faintest breath issue from the pale lips.

"The child is quite dead," he says, "it must be owing to some weakness of the heart that she has died thus suddenly."

"Here, my man," untying the bandage over Alain's eyes, "do you know this poor little maid?"

"Oh, sir," gasps Alain, "it is my sister, my little Jeanne, and she has died to save me."

"She has, my friend, though mercifully not as she evidently intended, by the bullets of my men," says the Officer solemnly.

"Whom the gods love die young," says the doctor, apart, "perhaps they loved this little brown-faced French girl, and smiled on her as she died. It is hard to think that the captive there must die after all, and that her act of self-devotion must be futile."

"Softly, Herr Doctor," says the Officer in command in an undertone, "it may *not* be useless after all, for our General has come on the field, and I will tell him the story, and bring him to look on the child." Up to his grey-haired, bronzed, soldierly Chief goes the Officer, and when he has told his pitiful tale, the Chief comes and looks at Jeanne Margot with something which looks like a tear in his cool, grey eye, and he calls her Little Joan, not of Arc, but of Rouen; and tells Alain that he is pardoned, and then the General rides away, and the soldiers place the little maid of Rouen on an empty gun carriage and gently bear her home, with poor, foolish Alain, whom with her own young life she saved, weeping bitterly by her side.

And when the pitying soldiers try to comfort him by praising her, and by saying that she had the soul of a heroine, and died as befitted one, he bends his head upon his breast, and only weeps the more bitterly. . . . And so they take her home; through the Market Place, in which another brave Norman maid met her death in long-past

times; through the dark little shop of her Uncle Léon, the curio dealer, go the bearers of this little maid of Rouen, and when they have placed her with tenderness, yea, and with reverence, on her little white bed, they leave her, and the broken-hearted old man comes and weeps beside her; and as he sits there watching by his dead, a sentiment of deep and profound pity takes hold of him, and moves him as he has not been moved for many years. He pities invaded France, he pities repentant Alain, he pities himself, and he pities little dead Margot, by whom he keeps the last watch. . . . And the eventide comes on, and little stars like golden lamps hang over the City of Rouen and over Uncle Léon's house, and when the townsfolk pass by it, they look up very sadly, and they, too, pity dead Margot, the Maid of Rouen.

* * * * *

But the good citizens would not pity Jeanne Margot if they could see how Grandmère comes for her in the boat of love, adown the long, deep, misty river which divides this land of to-day from the fair and beauteous land of for ever.

Down this river, which should surely be called the River of Life, instead of the River of Death, sails that beautiful boat which came for dame Marguérite Chatrain a while ago. And when it reaches the appointed place it stops, and into it steps a new and spiritual, a lovely and radiantly happy Jeanne Margot—a Jeanne Margot with no look of pain on

her face, nor aught of grief in her eyes—a Jeanne Margot whose misty garments are as white as newly-fallen snow—a Jeanne Margot round about whom is a soft and silvery brightness, a singular brightness, which pertains only to those who are going to live in the adorable presence, and be satisfied for ever and for ever. Now the angel who has come for the maid of Rouen is Grandmère, and when Jeanne Margot looks on her beautiful face she knows her, and folding her hands devoutly together, she exclaims, “Blessed be God, Who has sent *thee* for me, Grandmère,” and she who was once the peasant woman of Chatrain’s mill puts her arms round the child whom she guarded, and says, joyfully, thankfully, “Yea, blessed be God, Who sent me to thee, little Margot.”

The Baby and the Butterfly.

BY MARY HOLDSWORTH.

HE was the most wonderful Baby in the world. Everybody said so, so of course it must have been true. At any rate, his mother believed it; and pray, who could have been a better judge? And then he was such a happy Baby, always laughing and talking in his pretty baby language, and having all sorts of jokes to himself. He was the friend of everybody, and everybody was his friend. He used to lie awake at nights talking to the stars as they peeped in at his window to watch over him; the funniest stories he used to tell them, and they understood what he said, too, for they used to twinkle with fun, and then the Baby would nearly double himself up with mirth, and laugh—such a merry, pretty little laugh it was, like a peal of silver bells. Then in the daytime, he used to sit out in the old-fashioned garden and have fine games with the birds and flowers. He knew the songs of all his pretty feathered friends, from the cheerful little robin redbreast and the shy cuckoo to the mellow thrush and glossy blackbird. They were not afraid of him either, for they would come and perch

on the boughs near him, and sing him their sweetest songs ; and then he would sway his little body to and fro in time to the music, and join in with his cooing little voice.

As for the flowers, they all turned to greet him with a smile, when he paid them his morning visit, peeping into each flower-cup and bell to see what new beauties had unfolded under the genial rays of the sun ; he loved them as if they had been children.

One morning when he was toddling round the garden to see his favourite flowers, his eyes lit upon a most strange and gorgeous creature. Whether it was a bird or a flower, the Baby could not tell, for it had beautiful colours like a flower, and yet it had wings like a bird. He could not make it out at all. There it was fluttering in and out amongst his pet flowers, dipping first into one and into another, its lovely wings glittering in the sun. It had not a sweet scent like the flowers, nor did it sing prettily like the birds. The Baby followed it with eager blue eyes as it flitted about from flower to flower.

At last a wonderful idea came into his wise little head. Why, of course it was a flower that had learnt how to fly ! That was it, thought the Baby. He toddled unsteadily along (he was such a little thing, you know), following his new-found treasure about with eager outstretched hands, for he *must* have that pretty flower with wings. On, on he went, down the garden paths, through the open gate. (Oh, John, John, what possessed you to leave it open this particular morning ?)

The sun was shining down fiercely on his little fair uncovered head, but he did not feel it ; his eyes were riveted on his pretty flying flower ; he had nearly got it, too, as it stopped to settle for a moment on a wild rose bush, his little hot hand had nearly grasped it, when off it flew, right over the Baby's head. The rosy lips began to quiver with disappointment, and the blue eyes to fill with tears, he had felt so sure of getting it. But tired and hot as he was, he would not give in. On, on he went again, bravely and hopefully, as the pretty thing, just to tease him, came fluttering down just in front of him. Oh, the long weary chase it gave him, up one dusty lane and down another, into a field and then into a wood—always just on the point of being caught, and always just getting away in time from the little eager outstretched hand.

Oh, Baby, Baby, you little thought what a race you were going to run when you first set eyes on that pretty flower with wings !

But everything comes to him who waits, and so the Baby found ; for the flying flower stopped too long to rest on a cool green leaf, and with a gurgle of delight he eagerly grasped the treasure he had so long sought.

Hours afterwards he was discovered by his anxious mother, lying asleep under the shadow of a friendly tree ; the pearly tears were standing on his eyelashes, but a happy smile was on his rosy lips, and there, tightly clutched in the tiny hand, was the long-coveted treasure—a beautiful Butterfly.

“Darling.”

BY L. T. MEADE.

“She had two little legs
As fat as any pegs,
And two little feet as well,
And golden hair,
And a face so fair—
And more I cannot tell.”

THE first time I saw Darling I was eight years old, and she was six. I never cared about girls, and I was very sorry when mother said I must go in and play with her.

Darling lived next door. I met her in the hall; it was a rather cold day, and she had a dormouse curled up in her fat hand.

“I call him Chestnut,” she said, looking at me, and speaking as if we had known each other all our lives. “Come upstairs, and I’ll show you his cage.”

Darling waddled on in front; she was very stout, and her legs *were* fat. She had fat shoulders, too, and a face as round as a moon. I don’t know whether she was pretty

or not, but I thought her very nearly as good fun as a boy, when she tramped on before me up the stairs.

"This is my nursery," she said, "and this is Chestnut's cage. That's my bird in the cage in the window. His name is Bully, but he can't sing."

"You've got a nice cat," I said, going up to where a big Persian cat sat in front of the fire.

Darling gave the Persian cat an indifferent glance.

"Her name is Fluff," she said. "I like Tib better, Tib's the garden cat. You shall see him some day. Now, if you sit on the floor I'll put Chestnut in your lap. You mustn't let Fluff see him."

I sat down at once; I never^o thought anyone would ever see me obeying a little girl, but when Darling spoke in her solemn little fat voice, I didn't mind a bit.

We sat down side by side near the fire, and I quite enjoyed myself. I held Chestnut half the time, by the clock, and Darling held him the other half. She was very particular that I shouldn't have a minute more of him than she had. All the time, while he lay curled up either in her hand or mine, with his little chest heaving up and down, and his eyes shut, and his pretty little pointed nose pressed up against his tiny paws, Darling kept chattering.

"Do you think lessons are any use?" she asked.

I answered at once that I didn't.

"Nor do I," she replied. "I have a sister, you know, but she is away on a visit at present. She's older nor me, but

she doesn't like lessons a bit more. Have you got a man or a woman governess to teach you?"

"I go to school," I said. "I am eight years old."

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Darling. "My sister's eight. We have a woman to teach us, she comes every day; we give her marks, and she doesn't often get good ones, I can tell you. I'm very glad she's away at present. If you come to the window now, and press your nose to the pane, perhaps you'll see Tib; he often goes for a walk in the dark."

I did what Darling told me, but I didn't see Tib, although I looked very hard indeed.

It was time for me to go home very soon after that, and when I went, Darling raised herself solemnly on tip-toe, and kissed me on the tip of my chin.

"You're not bad for a boy," she said. "And if you don't mind, I'll call you Monkey."

I said I didn't care what she called me, and we parted, quite good friends.

Two days afterwards, I went back again to see her. I was told to go up to her nursery. When I went into the room, I found her sitting on the carpet near the window. Her fat face had tear marks on it, and her round blue eyes looked awfully sad.

"Come here, Monkey," she said, the moment she saw me. "Come and look at Chestnut; Nurse says he's dead, but I don't believe her."

I threw myself down on the floor by Darling's side, and

took the dormouse into my own hand, and examined him all over. He was very cold, and his eyes were tight shut, and his little chest didn't heave up and down.

"He's dead," I said, putting him back into Darling's lap. "He's quite dead. Don't you see he doesn't breathe? When creatures don't breathe, they are dead."

Darling's face grew scarlet while I was speaking. Before I had finished, her shoulders began to heave up and down, and her tears fell flop, flop, on Chestnut's little body. She did not make any noise when she cried, but she shed so many tears that poor Chestnut had quite a bath.

As a rule I hate cry-baby girls, but I could not hate Darling.

"Look here," I said; "I wish Chestnut wasn't dead."

"Thank you, Monkey," she replied. She kept on crying, however, and I had to think of something else to comfort her.

"I've got sixpence," I said. "Would you like to have it?"

"Sixpence isn't alive," she answered. "I want something that's alive."

"Well," I said, "I'm alive; you can have me."

"Thank you, Monkey," she said again, but then she added, "You'll have to go home when you are sent for. You can't stay with me always, as Chestnut did."

"I could if we was married," I said. "S'pose we was to be married?"

Darling stopped crying when I said this, and looked hard at me.

"S'pose," she said, putting her hand into mine, "that you and I was married, Monkey; and Fluffy and Tib; and my dolls, Rosie and Jim. S'pose we was all married the same day—s'pose that we had a marriage and a buryage the same day? Chestnut could have his buryage, and we could be married; three marriages the same day."

Darling's eyes grew quite happy; there wasn't the sign of a tear in them. She put Chestnut back into his cage, and made room for me to sit near her on the window sill.

"We must have a cake," she said; "a big one. It had better be sponge, for Tib likes sponge cake, and so does Fluffy. We'll have to catch Tib on the morning of the wedding, and lock him up till it's time for us all to go to church. How is weddings done, Monkey?"

"I don't know," I said. "Some people go to Church, but I don't think everyone does. I once saw a wedding, and the man took the woman's hand, and said, 'I take you to have and to hold'—so I'll take you, Darling, to have and to hold,—and we can do that up here in the nursery."

"I don't think Fluff will at all like it when Tib takes her to have and to hold," said Darling, looking out of the window. "But anyhow, afterwards there'll be the cake. We must be sure to divide it fair."

I went home that evening and told mother that Chestnut was dead, and that I was going to marry Darling, and I asked her if she would give us a wedding cake. She said she would, and she laughed like anything when I said that

Fluffy and Tib were to be married the same day, and that Darling's dolls were also to be a bride and bridegroom. But when I described Darling's tears falling on Chestnut's little body, mother said—

"Poor lamb, poor sweet wee lamb!" and then she gave orders to have a great big sponge cake made, and said it was to be frosted, and the names of the three brides and the three bridegrooms were to be written on it in pink sugar.

I really felt quite excited. I was ashamed to tell any of my boy friends that I was soon to be a bridegroom, but I thought a lot about it.

The buryage and the marriage were to be the very next day, and the cake was barely cold when I carried it into Darling's house.

She was waiting for me up in the nursery—she looked quite solemn and awfully nice. I think her face was fatter than ever, and her eyes bluer. She had put Chestnut into such a sweet little coffin. It was the shape of a little heart, and had been given to her full of chocolates. The chocolates were all eaten now, and Chestnut lay in it, covered over with white cotton wool.

"Isn't it a sweet little grave-box?" said Darling; "but we must be quick about the buryage, for Tib is locked up in the nursery cupboard, and is mewing like anything. I'd like to have taken Tib to the buryage, but maybe he'd have run away."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," I said. "Let's be quick and

get it over. Here's the cake in this box, and it's such a stunner."

"Let's peep at it," said Darling.

She stood on tip-toe, and gazed down at the white frosted cake with its pink letters, and a smile crept about her mouth.

Then we put on our hats, and went out into the garden. It was bitterly cold in the garden, and Darling stood and shivered with Chestnut's grave-box in her hand, while I dug the grave. I dug it as deep as I could, and we put Chestnut's white coffin in, and Darling and I took turns to throw the earth on it. He was buried in the very centre of her own garden, then we went back to the house.

Well, the wedding was rather noisy, for Tib and Fluff really behaved so badly. Whenever we tried to make Tib take one of Fluff's paws, he spat and growled, and made for the door. We were awfully excited, trying to get those cats properly married. The dolls, of course, were all right, and Darling and I held each other's hands tight, and I said to her, "I take you, Darling, to have and to hold." And she said to me, "I take you, Monkey, to have and to hold." Then she burst out laughing, and said, "Do look at that rogue of a Tib!"

At last we were all comfortably married, and we sat down to eat the cake. Even Tib became better tempered then, he lapped up a saucer of milk, and ate a lot of cake, and glared at Fluffy with his green eyes. But even then I don't

think he was a bit fond of her, for presently when we opened the nursery door a little chink, he darted out and went back to the garden. I felt awfully afraid he might be going to dig up Chestnut, to eat him for his supper, but I didn't say this to Darling.

After her nice milk and sponge cake, Fluffy went to sleep by the fire. She wasn't a bit excited at being a bride; and as to the dolls, they stared at each other as I knew they meant to stare as long as they both existed.

But with Darling and me it was different. She was my little wife now, and I loved her like anything, and we sat with our arms round each other, and ate wedding cake and chattered.

Darling laughed a good deal, and seemed ever so merry. I was surprised therefore when I suddenly felt some great big tears splashing on my hand.

"What is the matter, Darling?" I asked.

"I'm thinking how bitter cold Chestnut must be," she answered. And then some more tears splashed down on me, and I felt quite uncomfortable.

I went home after a bit; I did so wish I could take my bride with me, but there was no help for it, even though I was a married man I was also a school-boy, and I had to go back to lessons, and early bed.

The moment I got into the house mother said—

"I hope, Arthur dear, you did not have that poor little dormouse buried?"

"Of course we did, mother," I answered. "Darling and I buried him in the garden."

Then I told her all about it, and how Darling cried because he was cold.

"Well," said mother, "I have just been talking to a gentleman who knows a lot about dormice, and he says he does not think Chestnut is dead at all. He says they often sleep for days like that in cold weather."

"Oh, mother," I answered, catching hold of her hand, "then must Chestnut be unburied?"

"I don't know," she said. "It would be a pity to waken Darling's hopes, if he is really dead."

But I didn't agree a bit about that, and after a little more talk mother said she would go and see Darling's father and mother, and try and get them to take Chestnut out of his grave.

"But now, Arthur," she added, "you must go to bed, for it is too late for you to be up any longer."

I felt horrid when mother said that, but of course I had to obey.

And now, what *do* you think? They dug Chestnut up, and took him out of his grave-box, and put him into the oven. The oven wasn't very hot, you know, but it was hot enough to make Chestnut open his eyes.

Then he was put back into his cage, and mother brought the cage to me.

You can't think how delighted I was! Before I took him

back to Darling I peeped at the pet, and there he was, with his eyes wide open and as black as ink, and with his sharp little teeth cracking a nut.

I couldn't eat any breakfast; I rushed away into the next house.

I ran up at once to the nursery. Darling was sitting by the breakfast table, and she was just putting a spoonful of bread and milk into her mouth.

"I wish you'd shut the door after you," said Nurse, quite crossly.

But Darling wasn't cross.

"Is that you, Monkey?" said my little wife.

"Yes," I said, "it's me, and see what I have got!"

I put the cage into her hands. She got very red, and her little fat fingers trembled.

I helped her to open the top of the cage. There was Chestnut staring up at her. "

"It isn't a new dormouse," she said, looking up at me.

"No," I said, "it's the one that had his buryage yesterday; he's come alive again."

I don't know what Darling said, but I wish you could have seen her. The way she laughed, and the way she kissed Chestnut, and the way she hugged me! Oh, dear, oh, dear; it's many a year ago, and I'm a big school-boy now, but I can't forget it.

Simon d'Ormont's Treasure-chest.

A STORY OF SWITZERLAND.

BY FANNY BARRY,
AUTHOR OF "SOAP BUBBLE STORIES," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE small Châlet belonging to the Ormont family was built on the slope of a grassy hill above Territet.

Behind it rose an open clearing, fringed with pine trees and bushes. In front stretched a belt of cherry trees, and far below gleamed the wide lake with its border of distant snow-topped mountains.

On a fine day little boats with lateen sails—looking, with their clear-cut reflections, like grey-winged swallows—skimmed the blue water; and faintly from the town below the sounds of modern life, the railway whistle and steam-boat bell, came up to the Ormonts' solitude.

No houses were visible, except Vevey, far in the distance

upon its promontory, with poplar trees standing sentinel round it.

The Châlet itself was of rough stone, which had long ago been painted yellow. Behind was the great barn, its heavy double doors clamped with iron. On the southern side, the living rooms, with wide eaves, sun-reddened shutters, and tall snow-chimney. A little garden came up to the door, with a great clump of scarlet peonies that burned like flame-flowers against the universal greenness.

It was all very small, but neat and well-kept; and as neat as everything else was the old Ormont grandmother—a picturesque figure in her simple dress, and black silk head-dress with its lace frillings—who sat on a wooden bench by the pink chestnut tree, holding the youngest grandchild on her knee, and singing a song she had been taught long ago in her own childhood.

Close by, the two goats browsed peacefully, and David, the elder brother of the baby, cut wood with a regular *chop, chop*, that seemed to add to the soothing drowsiness of the hot afternoon.

Though David was only thirteen, and small for his age, he worked hard and incessantly. His father had died the year before, and since then the mother and grandmother found it difficult to live at all. To add to their troubles the winter had been unusually long and cold, and a drought followed, which threatened to bring starvation to many families in the district.



"THE OLD ORMONT GRANDMOTHER SAT ON A WOODEN BENCH, HOLDING
THE YOUNGEST GRANDCHILD ON HER KNEE."

There seemed nothing left in the Ormont Châlet that the two women could sell or exchange for food. The furniture was simple, and worth little except to themselves.

The grandmother still used her old black carved wheel to spin wool and flax, which she sold to the neighbours; and beyond that there was only David's oak chest that had descended from father to son since 1406—the date carved quaintly upon its elaborately scrolled lid.

It was the one relic which showed that the Ormonts came of a good old family, whose fortunes had fallen in the world, until of all their large estates, their Châteaux, and great possessions, they owned only the scrap of land on which stood the little yellow Châlet.*

David was very fond of this chest. His father had often explained to him the meaning of the complicated design upon its cover, between which the great iron clamps wandered cunningly—the figure of a knight on horseback, with a pouch of money by his side, stooping down to give alms to a beggar, with the motto in old French, “Save well, and spend well.” The knight amongst the carved emblems of the d'Ormont family, held a long lance in his hand, the point touching one of the beautifully-worked rosette nails with which the iron cross-bars were studded.

David could not help thinking that the motto was a very unsuitable one for his ancestors, who had apparently wasted their substance in every sort of rioting, in spite of the efforts of Simon d'Ormont—the mediæval seigneur who

was represented on the box lid—who “by his wise and virtuous life had brought great glory and riches” into the family. So said the old chronicle, which David’s father had read in the library of B——.

David often wished that Count Simon had been able to instil his own prudence into his descendants. They had all been only too ready to throw away their money, but none of them had apparently ever thought of obeying the first part of the injunction !

CHAPTER II.

Every night David sat up in the little kitchen with his grandmother, long after his mother and Marie had gone to bed ; Madame Ormont spinning at her small black wheel, telling him stories of things that had happened in her own childhood, or curious traditions and fairy tales, long forgotten by the well-instructed children of the present generation.

David, with his wood-carving tools round him, struggled meanwhile to imitate the carving on his oak chest, often pleasing himself and his grandmother by unexpected successes, for he had a real talent for it.

“This year will be a hard one for us,” said Madame Ormont one evening, as she and David worked together in the soft summer twilight ; “I don’t know what we’re going to sell to tide it over.”

"I don't see that we have anything left," said David, "unless it's the goats."

"Coco! and Mimi!" cried Madame Ormont. "Why I'd as soon sell the blessed child; they're like one of the family! Oh, David! we can't sell *them*. No, no! My wheel must go," she continued, half to herself; "it's been a good friend to me, but it must end with strangers. I can get a good price for it in Montreux, and I can't do as much with it now as when I was younger."

"Oh, grandmother, you can't part with that; it's like a bit of yourself. I'd rather my chest went," said David, anxiously.

"I wouldn't have you sell that, the only good thing you have left, not for *anything*, David!" his grandmother cried sharply; and David did not answer, but on the spot he made up his mind to a great sacrifice.

He knew that both his mother and grandmother intended to go into Montreux the next morning. He would let them get well on in front, and then wheel down the chest on a barrow to the old curiosity shop.

Monsieur Perciaz had often bought his carvings, and had offered several times to buy the chest, too; but David had declared that whatever happened they could never part with it.

It was only Madame Ormont's unselfish suggestion about the wheel that had made him think of it.

"How surprised they'll be to-morrow, when I bring home the money," he thought with a smile, as he kissed his grand-

mother, and tumbled into bed. "The old spinning-wheel needn't go, and we shall have quite a little fortune!"

David was soon fast asleep, but all his dreams were of the old Ormont ancestor. It seemed to him that the knight of the box-lid stood over him with his long spear in his hand, pointing to the oak chest.

"Find it out! 'Save well, and spend well!' Find it out!" he kept repeating.

"I wonder whatever he means," thought David in his dream; "the box is empty enough, I know that."

David was roused the next morning by his grandmother's voice. She was asking him to run to a neighbour's Châlet, and fetch some flax for her.

"It won't take you long, David, my son, and though we shall be gone when you come back, we'll have your breakfast put out all ready for you."

David jumped up. In a few minutes he was dressed, and started off in the fresh morning air up the hillside. He soon returned with the flax, and putting it away carefully in the press, he began to drag the old chest from its niche under the window.

He had persuaded a friend to come and help him, and together the two boys pulled and pushed at the heavy box, until they carried it outside the Châlet. With the help of some boards they hoisted it on a hand-barrow, and David set off with it triumphantly down the steep shady path towards Montreux.

When he reached the side street in which Monsieur Perciaz's shop was situated, he left the barrow outside, and went in to ask the dealer in curiosities to come out and look at it.

The shop was empty, but he fancied he heard voices proceeding from Monsieur Perciaz's private sitting-room, behind. He tapped gently, and to his astonishment the door opened and his grandmother came out, looking vexed and excited.

"I won't take a penny less, Monsieur Perciaz," she said angrily. "A beautiful wheel that I've had this sixty years; you'll sell it for double!"

"But, my dear Madame Ormont, only look at it calmly! Come, we will just see it again. I have no wish to cheat you in any way."

Monsieur Perciaz, with spectacles on nose, went to the part of the shop where they had left the wheel. It was gone!

Madame Ormont ran round wildly, looking into every hole and corner, but it was nowhere to be found. It had disappeared completely.

At that moment she caught sight of David.

"You here, child! What is that for?" she said sharply.

David hung his head guiltily.

"I brought the chest down; I wanted to save your wheel," he muttered, almost inaudibly.

"And I brought my wheel down!" cried his grandmother.

"I didn't want you to know till I came back—and now it's gone. Oh, whatever shall we do, David?"

"Someone's stepped in and stolen it," said Monsieur Perciaz briskly; "though it's an awkward thing to take off—so noticeable! Don't you worry yourself, Madame Ormont; we'll have the thief in no time."

But Madame Ormont refused to be comforted.

Meanwhile David ran out to see after the safety of his own possession.

As he did not return, his grandmother, who had been minutely describing the wheel to Monsieur Perciaz, opened the shop door, and almost fainted at the sight of David seated on an empty barrow, dissolved in a flood of tears.

"It's gone! Gone, too!" sobbed David, convulsively.

"The chest—gone, as well!" she gasped; while Monsieur Perciaz looked in the greatest bewilderment from one to the other.

"You don't mean to say they've taken your great box, too?" he enquired. "The rascals! I'll just run down and give notice about it." And Monsieur Perciaz disappeared down the street, leaving David and his grandmother looking at each other hopelessly through the open shop door.

"Oh, grandmother, I'll never do anything without telling you, again," said David, as a few hours later they climbed dejectedly up the road to their Châlet. "But I did mean to try and be unselfish, I really *did*, grandmother."

"I know you did, my child, and I'm grateful to you,"

said old Madame Ormont, as she unlocked the house door, and wiped away a few tears secretly.

David went to let the goats out of the shed, but was recalled by a cry of joy from his grandmother—

“David! David! They're here! Both—not stolen! All safe, after all!”

David flew rather than ran into the Châlet, and saw Madame Ormont standing over her little black wheel, tears of delight running down her face; while in its accustomed corner stood the oak chest, looking as if it had never been away for a moment.

“How did they get here?” cried David, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

“How can I tell?” said his grandmother, sitting down to her wheel, and turning it eagerly. “It is impossible to imagine who can have whisked them up in this time!”

David unlocked the chest with the unwieldy key, and peered in anxiously.

Everything was just as it had been; but he could almost imagine he saw a smile of triumph on the wooden features of the knight on horseback.

CHAPTER III.

For several nights after this David was haunted by his dream of the carved knight of the box-lid.

As soon as he fell asleep it seemed to him that Count

Simon leaped from the chest on to the bed, and cantered his horse three times round and round, crying—

“ Save well, and spend well,
And pull my horse's tail,
Count upward from the coffer's edge,
And push the twisted nail ! ”

What could it mean ? Added to the mysterious re-appearance of the old wheel, and of the chest itself ; David could not help attaching some importance to it.

Perhaps the chest that had always belonged to the Ormonts refused to be sold to any other family ? For David argued that if people could become so fond of a piece of furniture, there was no reason the furniture should not become fond of *them*. *

His grandmother, to whom he had told his strange dream, advised that both the wheel and the chest should be kept for a few days, while they tried if they could discover any clue to the mystery.

The baby, Marie, seemed to have taken a great and sudden fancy to the old box. She could not bear to be parted from it for a moment ; but was quite happy if she was allowed to play by it in the small white-curtained window, where the pots of flowers stood. She would move her hands lovingly over the carving, and when she came to the horse's tail (which was made of beaten iron) she would laugh and point to it, as if that particularly pleased her. She tried to push the rosette nails up and down, and often appeared to be

talking about them ; though as she could not speak plainly, no one could understand what it was she wanted to say.

The two goats were also always trying to force their way into the kitchen, and snuffing round the chest.

David wondered if they thought there was something good to eat concealed inside, or what it could be that made them show such a marked interest in it.

One evening, in the twilight, the grandmother, coming home from the town, declared she distinctly saw a strange-looking little man in a cloak lead the goats towards the Châlet door, unlatch it, and drive them into the kitchen with a long stick. It was too dark for her to be able to see the man's face—in fact, it was but a small and shadowy form—but when she entered the house there was no one to be seen. The door was half open ; the goats were butting at the old chest, and had actually torn off one of the beautiful iron rosettes—for which they received a severe scolding.

Young Madame Ormont declared she had latched the door carefully when she left, and David had not been to the Châlet since breakfast ; but as everyone knew that no goat could unfasten a door, there must have been some carelessness *somewhere !*

After this, David tried in vain to keep Coco and Mimi out of the kitchen. Though they had always been very well-behaved goats, it now seemed impossible for them to remain long out of mischief. They were perpetually in the house, jumping about the carved chest ; and it was utterly useless,

either to tie them up, or lock them in the shed, however securely.

The grandmother worked harder than ever. The whirr of her wheel scarcely ceased all day ; but still the food grew scarcer and scarcer.

" Save well, and spend well,
And pull my horse's tail,
Count upward from the coffer's edge,
And push the twisted nail."

Every day David puzzled over his dream. He examined the oak chest carefully. He pushed all the nails this way and that, but none of them would move.

Then he tried to pull the horse's iron tail up and down, but that also seemed fast ; and at last he gave it up in despair.

" We shall just have to take it down again and sell it ; for I don't know what the little knight means," he said to his grandmother ; and the old woman shook her head, and went on spinning.

" Well, I can't say I can advise you—I'm not clever enough," she said. " If only your father's great-aunt were here—*she* would soon tell you all about it. She was always wonderfully clever in these kind of things ; and she is one of the last of the Ormonts."

" Where does she live ? Can't I go to her ?" asked David eagerly. " I wonder how it is I never heard of her before ?"

" Your father quarrelled with her about a piece of land," replied his grandmother, " and they never spoke again."

She has lived all her life in a lonely Châlet on the Col du Jaman. It is a difficult road."

"Oh, I'm sure I could find it," cried David. "Do let me go, grandmother! I will start by daybreak to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IV.

The Châlet of David Ormont's great-grand-aunt was perched on a precipitous overhanging ledge of rock, on a desolate slope of the mountain.

A grim row of fir trees shaded it behind; in front stretched a wild tangle of grass and bushes—the remains of a once-cultivated field and garden.

The house with its wooden galleries, and small dull-paned windows, had turned a dark deep brown from old age and the weather, so that in the distance it appeared to be almost black.

David shuddered at the deserted, forbidding-looking place. He had been wandering about the country since early morning, trying in vain to find the house; and now the rapid twilight of the mountains was beginning to set in. The wind was rising, and blew the clouds across the sky in fitful gusts.

David felt that he needed all the courage of his ancestors, the old knights, to approach the door, which was almost hidden by a mass of climbing plants.

At his first knock one of the windows opened, and a dark head looked out.

"Who are you? How dare you come to trouble me?" cried a shrill voice.

"I am David Ormont, your great-grand-nephew," said David bravely. "I know how clever you are, and I must come in, if you please, to ask you a question."

The head disappeared. There was the sound of a grating lock, and the door opened slowly.

"Come in, David Ormont," said the voice; and David, stepping forward, found himself in a large dark room with a low ceiling.

The old woman who let him in seemed to be so wrinkled and aged, that David wondered how she could be alive at all.

Her grey hair hung round her face in long elf locks. Her dress of brown homespun was in rags. She waved her thin hand before David, and said impressively—

"Let me know what you want, David Ormont; and I will see if I can help you."

Holding his cap in his hand, David hastily told the story of the carved chest, and the dreams that had haunted him—[looking all the time anxiously at his great-grand-aunt, to see what she thought of it.

The old woman's dark face glowed, and her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"I see it all," she cried. "How blind, how foolish you have been! Poor Simon d'Ormont! He has been trying

to show you where your fortune lay, and you wouldn't understand him. Don't you see, child, that the carved knight (who can only speak to animals, to infants, and to older and stupider people in their sleep) was trying to tell you the secret of the treasure-chest? He was determined it should not leave the family; and when you took it down to Montreux to sell it, he carried it up again, together with your grandmother's old wheel, which I daresay had been a kind friend to him. How hard he must have worked, poor creature!

"Evidently he drove the goats into the house every day, hoping they would be strong enough to break the lid open; and that was the shadowy figure your grandmother saw in the twilight. Then he tried your sister Marie, but I suppose no one could understand what it was she was saying. As to your dream, *that* is simple enough. All you have to do is to pull the horse's iron tail, push the third iron nail round three times, and no doubt the mystery will be explained to you. Silly boy! Could you not see that the little knight riding round three times, meant the third nail?"

David apologized humbly. He felt that he certainly must be very stupid not to have thought of this explanation before.

His great-grand-aunt looked at him critically. Her manner became more amiable, and at last she declared her intention of accompanying him home the next morning, for it had grown far too dark for him to attempt the difficult descent of the mountain that evening.

David would have preferred to set off at once, for he secretly dreaded a night spent in the lonely Châlet; but as there was no help for it, he rolled himself round in a blanket given him by the old woman, and curling himself up in a corner of the room was soon fast asleep.

No Ormont ancestor troubled his dreams, and he opened his eyes at daybreak to find his great-grand-aunt standing by him with a stick in her hand, prepared for her walk to the Châlet.

She offered him a slice of bread, and they set off together in silence down the steep pathway.

The fresh mountain air blew round them. The sun shone, and David's spirits rose so rapidly he began to sing from pure lightness of heart.

In the afternoon the strange pair arrived at the Ormont's Châlet, where the old grandmother stood watching eagerly for David's return. As soon as she caught sight of the travellers she called to young Madame Ormont, and the great-grand-aunt was received most respectfully.

The visitor, however, scarcely glanced at the little Châlet, or its inhabitants. Her whole attention seemed to be concentrated upon the old chest. She went up to it eagerly, and tapped it all over. Then, throwing down her stick, she turned one of the nails on the cover rapidly. She pulled out the iron tail of the horse with one vigorous stroke of her hand, and the whole inner lining of the heavy box-lid fell with a crash on to the ground.

Inside was a hollow the length of the chest, in which lay a number of time-worn leather rolls, filled with ancient gold and silver pieces.

The Ormonts were so astonished that for some time they remained absolutely speechless.

Then the baby Marie began to clap her hands and laugh; and the grandmother, stooping down to snatch her up, distinctly saw the little man in the long cloak standing in the window, and looking towards them with a shadowy smile of satisfaction.

"Well, you'll have plenty to live upon now for some time to come," said the great-grand-aunt, "so I may as well return to my own Châlet. Good-bye, David, my son; be a brave man, and never forget the motto on Simon d'Ormont's Treasure-chest."

Lame Dorothy.

BY KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF "PUFF;" "PEPIN, THE DANCING BEAR;" ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DOROTHY'S grandmother, Mrs. Ashwell, was ill, so ill that Dorothy's mother had to go and stay with her.

"Grandmother will soon be better," Mrs. Stone said, as she kissed her little daughter; "I will come back, dear child, as soon as I can leave her. Take care of father, dear, I know my maid will be a brave little Dorothy."

Dorothy stood at the cottage door smiling till her mother was out of sight, then she caught up her pinafore and held it to her eyes to hide that she was crying. Dorothy was eight years old, a broad-shouldered, strongly-built child, but she was lame, and she could not walk without a crutch; she used this so cleverly that her father often said his Dolly went about with her crutch quite as quickly as other children of her age did on their legs.

Dorothy laughed, and answered,

"Yes, father, but then, you see, they have only two legs, and I have three."

She was a happy, contented little girl, though her deep-set blue eyes, with their strangely earnest and inquiring expression, and a compression round her mouth, unusual in a child, told that at some time she must have passed through a good deal of suffering. Dorothy did not pity herself; her mother had told her that many lame people could not get about as well as she could, so it seemed to the child that, as she had this privilege, she was bound to use it for others as well as for her own pleasure.

Her father's cottage stood beside a railway crossing, far away from other houses, and Dorothy had few playfellows; few playfellows of her own sort and age, but she had others in plenty.

First and foremost was Bruno, a big St. Bernard puppy which had been given to her father; then there were two semi-Persian cats called Pop and Pansy; she had a jackdaw named Jacob, and two canaries in cages—she had named one of the birds Sweet, and the other Saffron. Besides these, she had pets among the squirrels in a wood behind the cottage; the robins would come in and pick up crumbs on the kitchen floor, when Jacob and Pop were both out of the way.

Father was very kind, when he came in, he saw that Dorothy had been crying, and he asked her to help him open the gates about ten minutes before the train was

expected. There was little traffic on the line, for it ended at the next station, and the crossing was rarely used by vehicles; John Stone often said his post as gate-opener was almost a sinecure, except for keeping stray cattle and sheep off the line, he did not see much use in the gates being there.

Dorothy liked to stand in the little cottage garden, and see the train go by, and visitors to and from the great house, for whose convenience this bit of line had been chiefly made, as they were sometimes royal personages, used to look out for, and wave their hands to, the little smiling lame girl.

One train passed at eleven, another at five; the down trains from London passed at twelve, at six, and at half-past seven.

When the twelve o'clock train had gone, John Stone said:

"See here, Dorothy, I'm off to Burston; it's polling day for the new member, and I must go and vote; there! you've no call to look frightened, child, I'll be back long before you want me; I'll leave the gates shut for fear of a stray cow or two; you can get tea ready by four, my lass, I'll like as not be here by then."

Dorothy felt disturbed, she could not remember that she had ever been left quite alone.

She fixed her earnest blue eyes on her father.

"Father, won't you wait to go till mother comes back? Suppose anything keeps you at Burston?"

The rough man laughed, and bent down to kiss his little daughter.

"There's a thoughtful little lass," he said; "the very spit of her mother; never fear, girly, I'll be home all right; I must be off now, the voting won't wait for mother, you see."

It was Spring-time, and Dorothy's mother had given her some flower-seeds to sow in her absence, for the child was very fond of gardening. Her father had made her a little kneeling cushion, which was much easier for her than stooping; she became so much interested in putting in her seeds, that she was surprised when she looked at the sun to see how late it was. Her father had a watch, but the child and her mother had no other clock than the sun, and when the sun did not shine, they had to judge by the light, and the many little signs and warnings which help those who live away from others to learn how time passes.

"To think of that," Dorothy said, "and I haven't yet put in the mignonette seed nor the stocks, I must leave them till to-morrow, or tea won't be ready for father; will it, Pansy?" she said to the fluffy kitten, as it rubbed itself against her skirts.

She made tea—she did that sometimes for her mother—and then she spread the table, and set out the cold bacon and cheese for father.

She went out by the back door and looked up the hilly, tree-shaded road to watch for his coming. A lark was sing-

ing overhead, and Dorothy stood awhile listening, she so loved to hear the beautiful song.

When she came in, she began to fear her father's tea would be spoiled if it waited any longer ; and she carefully warmed a jug, and poured the tea off, as she had seen mother do, when father was late coming home.

Once more she went to the cottage door, and looked out ; the sun was much lower, but the birds were still singing cheerfully. Presently she saw, coming round the corner, in silent procession, Bruno and Pop, and the kitten Pansy, now almost as big as its mother ; they were coming for their tea, and Dorothy had often heard her father laugh at their punctuality ; he used to look at his watch and say they seldom missed by a minute, they always appeared at a quarter before five. It was a warm afternoon, but Dorothy felt suddenly cold : she had all at once remembered the five o'clock up-train.

She snatched at her crutch, and was soon at the foot of the road by which her father must come. There was not any one in sight, the only sound besides the birds was the tinkle of a sheep bell from the fields behind the trees that shaded the road. For a moment Dorothy stood still, her heart beat so fast that her sight was blurred ; then she suddenly remembered what must happen if no one unclosed the gates.

The train would be wrecked, people would be hurt and wounded ; it was likely, she thought, that someone might

be killed : it would be known that her father had left his post !

“What is to be done?” the child asked herself in her terror.

There was only one way : Dorothy saw that she herself must open the gates.

Dorothy had a trick of frowning when she was very much in earnest, and now her eyebrows met over her clear blue eyes, and she pressed her lips yet more tightly together. Could she open the gates ? There was no time to think in, she had got to do the best she could, and she felt sure that God would help her.

She hurried on to the line, to the gate nearest the station from which the train must be starting ; as she reached the gate she heard a far-off whistle ; she tugged at the fastening, and opened the gate ; she had helped her father to do this, but he had never allowed her to swing the gate open, and now its weight frightened her ; it seemed at first as if it would fly back in spite of all her efforts ; but she set her teeth hard, and by leaning her weight on her crutch, she could use both hands for the push which sent the gate slowly swinging backwards.

Dorothy breathed hard with relief, but there was still the other gate.

Looking forward, she saw distinct against the still blue sky the pale steam-cloud of the advancing train. This nerved her ; she went yet more quickly to the farther gate ;

her little crutch seemed to fly as she sped across the intervening road. Once more she looked round, the pale cloud was larger, nearer; it seemed to her that she heard the shish-shish of the oncoming train. Again the mist came before her eyes, then she resolutely turned her back on the coming danger, and pulled with all her strength at the gate.

CHAPTER II.

Dorothy's father seldom went to Burston, and to-day he met there so many old friends and acquaintances, that at first he was quite taken up in exchanging greetings with them, making enquiries for wives and children, and answering questions about his own belongings; he soon forgot the railway crossing and the five o'clock train. Everybody seemed to be out taking holiday on Election day, and John Stone had to refuse many hospitable offers of entertainment. Mr. Mash, however, the farmer on whose land he worked, would not take "No" for an answer; he insisted that John should come with him to "The Bull," and have a glass of ale to drink their candidate's health.

Just as John was leaving the place with his employer, a hand was laid on his sleeve.

"Hullo, Jack," a man said.

Jack turned, and saw the face of an old schoolfellow, a special friend who had gone to America when they both

left school, a man who was still, he fancied, on the other side of the Atlantic.

"I've been waiting for you all the morning," said the new-comer, "the folks told me you would be in to vote. Come and sit down, and let's have a look at you, old chap; I want to hear about your wife and child—they tell me you have both. I've got neither, worse luck."

John Stone's heart warmed at the sight of his old friend, and he became talkative; he had another glass of ale, but that was all, the time seemed to fly while he listened to his old chum's adventures.

The Bull Inn was close to Burston Church, and to-day the fine set of chimes had been ringing in every hour. John had heard them at two o'clock, and again at three, he hardly noticed them now, when they once more began to play "Rule Britannia."

The other man left off telling his story, and smiled sadly as he listened to the chimes.

"They mind me of my poor mother," he said, "she dearly loved those bells, she used to wish they would ring every day."

He pulled out his watch, "I'm a trifle slow," he said, "I want five minutes to four, and hark! there goes four on the clock."

John Stone jumped up from his chair; his face became so pale that his friend fancied he was ill.

John clapped his hand to his forehead, he looked dazed.

"I—I must go—I ought to have been home by now.

Good-bye," he stammered out, and then he hurried away.

It had taken him more than an hour to reach Burston, and he fancied he had walked as fast as he could, but now the dread of what might happen at the crossing seemed to give him extra speed. In his wild rush home he trespassed across fields, and climbed more than one hedge. He did not think first of the train, or of the consequences that would follow his own neglect of duty, there was the chance that the engine-driver might see the danger and stop in time; his thoughts did not dwell on that: he tried not to think at all as he ran, but before his mental sight was his darling Dorothy, his good, lame child; he felt sure she would try to open the gates, but she could not know in time, and if the train were not stopped, she might be at the gate when the engine reached it. . . A cry broke from his lips, and he ran on faster than before.

He reached the last turn in the tree-shaded road, and came in full view of the crossing.

Both the gates stood wide open, the train was out of sight, it had evidently passed through without damage.

"Dorothy, Dorothy!" he cried, and he tore down the little hill to his home.

A moment ago his heart had swelled with thankfulness, but as he listened and there was no answer, his awful terror came back.

There was no sign of Dorothy in the garden, and he hurried into the cottage.


The child sat leaning back in her own arm-chair; her crutch lay at her feet, she was very pale, . . . she opened her eyes slowly as her father came rushing in.

“I—I must have fallen asleep, father”—her voice sounded faint, and she did not attempt to get up—“I—I was dreaming that the train came before I could get the gate open.”

Toby's Tale.

BY ASCOTT R. HOPE,

AUTHOR OF "THE SEVEN WISE SCHOLARS;" "STORIES OUT OF SCHOOL-TIME;"
"SPINDLE STORIES," ETC.

"ELL us a tale, please," barked Hob and Nob, when they had grown tired of romping and rolling in the sun, like the idle puppies they were.

"A tale," said old Toby, the mastiff, waking up from a snooze at the threshold of his kennel, where on such a hot day he cared only to lie and watch the restless sports of these young playmates. "What sort of a tale do you want?"

"A new one," Hob wanted.

"A true one," Nob wanted.

"Puppy dogs' tales!" sniffed Toby, disdainfully. "There aren't any new stories nowadays, and one story is always as true as another. But if you can sit still for once, and listen with more respect than you usually show for what your elders have to say, I will do my best to please you."

"There must be plenty of adventures in it," said Hob.

"And it must make us laugh," said Nob.

"H'm!" growled the old dog, "you have got to take

what I give you, and be thankful." Then, after blinking his eyes and licking his paws for a little, to think over it, he sat up, and thus began—

"Once upon a time there was a poor puppy who had the misfortune to lose his mother at a very early age, and was given to be brought up by an ill-natured spaniel with two children of her own. This stepmother, as you may suppose, was very unkind to him, bit and snarled at him from morning till night, drove him out of the kennel to sleep on the bare ground, and would hardly let him have a mouthful of food. But the ill-used youngster was always good-natured and obliging, never quarrelled with his foster-brothers, though they were as proud and as harsh to him as their mother, never sulked, never complained, but contentedly gnawed the bare bones after they had done with them. He did not feel the least jealous when he saw how these other two were favoured by the old spaniel, who would sit fondly licking them into shape, or run about with them on the grass, but showed her teeth savagely if our hero offered to join in their amusements."

"Why, that's nothing but the story of Cinderella!" exclaimed Hob. "I have heard my mother tell it a hundred times, when I was no bigger than a kitten."

"Nothing of the kind," snapped Toby, in no very good humour at being so rudely interrupted. "If you will only have patience, you shall see this is quite a different story, and all made up out of my own head."

"I was about to tell you how the old spaniel hated this foster-son so much, that she hit upon a plan for getting rid of him. She took him out a walk one day, meaning to lose him in a great dark wood filled with cruel wild beasts. But the cunning puppy guessed what she would be at, and, as he went along at her heels, he rubbed himself against the trunks of the trees, so that he should be able to find his way back by hunting his own *hairs*—do you see the joke?"

"But there ought to have been seven of them?" put in Nob, who was taking it all much too seriously for jokes.

"But there weren't. There was only this one, whose name, I should tell you, was——"

"Tom Thumb, wasn't it?"

"That's all you know about it! His name was Jack, and after his hard-hearted stepmother had abandoned him to shift for himself, he lay down for a little in despair, waiting for the robins to come and cover him over with leaves."

"But what had become of the other one?" asked Nob, with a puzzled look on his face.

"Seems to me, we have heard something like all this before," growled Hob; but without taking any notice of their remarks, old Toby went on—

"After a time, poor Jack took courage, and set out to seek adventures and see the world. Before he had gone far, being very tired and hungry, he stopped at a house, where he begged the good wife to give him some supper and a lodging for the night.

“‘Alas!’ answered she, ‘you know not what a dangerous place you have come to. My husband is a notorious Ogre, who has a specially sweet tooth for young dogs. Luckily he is out hunting just now, so you shall have something to eat and welcome, but I should advise you to be off before he comes home, or he will make but a single mouthful of you.’

“Jack thanked her heartily for this good advice, and still more for an excellent bowl of bread and milk which she quickly set before him. But he had hardly finished licking it up, when a voice like thunder outside announced the return of the Ogre.

“‘Oh dear! what shall I do with you?’ cried the good woman, and made haste to hide Jack in the oven, just as her husband tramped in, shaking the whole house at every step.

“He was of course the hugest and most hideous Ogre ever seen. He had only one eye, but two mouths, each full of teeth as big and sharp as the broken glass on the garden wall, also a blue beard as long as a horse’s tail. He was armed all over with axes, butcher knives, chains, and other dreadful things. Round his waist he had a string of calves and lambs, and a sack full of hares and rabbits on his shoulders, which he flung on to the floor, bellowing for his supper as if he had been tied up for a fortnight.”

“Ah, ha! we know what’s coming next,” said Hob and Nob in one bark.

“You are very clever! But this is quite a new story,

which I am sure you can never have heard before. So hold your tongues, and prick up your ears.

"The Ogre, I was going to tell you, began to sniff suspiciously about him.

"*'Fee-fo-fum--*I smell dog's meat!' growled he, licking all his jaws, and rolling his bloodshot eye into every corner of the room.

"His wife in vain tried to persuade him that he was mistaken. The greedy monster searched high and low, and at last discovered Jack hidden in the oven, whom he dragged out, and fingered him all over, till the poor dog gave himself up for lost.

"*'All skin and bones!'* snarled the Ogre, in savage disappointment. 'We must fatten him up a bit, then he will be fit to make into sausages.'

"With this he flung Jack down upon a bed of straw beside the fireplace, and went on with his supper. When he had eaten enough to keep a whole pack of hounds for a month, he fell asleep, and began to snore as loud as a gun going off."

"Then Jack stole his treasures and ran away with them, didn't he?" said Nob, again snatching the story like a bone out of his elder's mouth, while Hob gave a yawn of impatience.

"No, indeed! my hero was much too honest a dog to steal anything; and I wouldn't tell you a story which had not a good moral. Wait a bit, and you shall see what you shall see.

"Either the Ogre was only pretending to be asleep, or

through the night he felt hungry, or perhaps he was afraid of his victim running away, for by and bye he got up, took his club, and felt about for the straw on which Jack lay. But the sly dog had been too wide awake for him. As soon as it grew dark, the first thing Jack did was to drag out a log of firewood, which he laid in his place, then slipped himself into a safe corner not far off. How he chuckled when he saw the Ogre groping about in the darkness, and breaking his shins against the coal-scuttle!

“Down came the club with a blow that would have smashed every bone in Jack's body, but it only hit the log. The Ogre gave two or three more tremendous whacks to make sure, after which he went to bed, and fell asleep for good, but nobody else in the house could sleep for the noise of his snoring.

“Next morning, on getting up, he was amazed to see Jack come frisking to meet him with a lively wag of his tail, as I hope, my dears, you always remember to do when you greet your masters and those who feed you.

“‘Hey! Ho!’ says the Ogre. ‘How's this? I thought you were ready for my breakfast.’

“‘Quite ready for mine,’ barked Jack in his pleasant way.

“‘But there must be something far wrong here!’ cried the stupid Ogre, who had more teeth than wits. ‘Did nothing happen to you through the night, eh?’

“‘Let me see,’ answered Jack, carelessly. ‘I think there must have been a mouse that flapped me across the nose

two or three times with its tail, but I was too sleepy to mind it.'

" 'Well, I never!' exclaimed the Ogre, staring at him in astonishment. 'Aren't you afraid of me, then?'

" 'Not a bit,' quoth Jack. 'What is there about you to be afraid of, pray?'

" 'Don't you know that I am a skilful Enchanter as well as an Ogre, and that I have the power of turning myself into any kind of terrible monster I please?'

" 'Seeing's believing!' said that impudent Jack.

" 'See here, then!' said the Ogre, and at once turned himself into a lion, stamping, roaring, tossing his mane, and opening his mouth, as if he would gulp the dog up like a fly.

" 'I don't see anything in that to make so much boast of,' Jack coolly told him, cocking his nose in the air before the lion's very jaws. 'It would be far more wonderful now if you could turn yourself into a smaller animal—say a rat, or a mouse, for instance.'

" 'I can do that just as well,' declared the Ogre, and at once turned himself into a rat upon the floor, which Jack quickly pounced upon, and killed him with a single shake.

" Having thus made an end of the Ogre, Jack released his wife, who had been shut up in the tower, to have her head cut off——"

" Oh! we know all about that," once more interrupted Hob in his rude way.

"What was her sister Anne doing meanwhile?" hinted Nob,

"Hadn't any sister Anne," snapped Toby. "She had a cow, and wanted Jack to take it to market for her."

"Oh, yes!" again interrupted Hob. "I have heard this old story till I am sick of it. But you are mixing it up somehow, you know."

"It isn't a bad story, but there surely ought to have been something in it about a beanstalk and a hen that laid golden eggs," was Nob's opinion.

But Toby had gone on without minding them. Dogs, you see, have not the good manners to understand that only one person should talk at a time; and when the puppies began to listen once more, it appeared they must have missed a bit of the tale, for now it was at this point—

"After travelling all day long through woods and mountains, then, without meeting any fresh adventure, or having had anything to eat that day, except the Ogre, towards evening Jack came to a cave, and boldly walked in. He found nobody at home, but to his joy he saw a bucket full of smoking porridge, and a bowl of milk laid out beside it, and a soft warm bed, all quite ready for him, just as if he were expected. So, without waiting to ask who all these nice things belonged to——"

"You ought to say *whom*, to make good grammar," corrected Hob, but Toby only glared at him, without stopping.

"—he eat up the porridge, and licked the milk till the dish

was clean, and lay down on the bed, and fell as sound asleep as if he had been an enchanted princess."

"Did he sleep a hundred years?" asked Nob, with much interest.

"He did not sleep a hundred winks, for he was awakened by a loud roaring, and into the cave came three bears—a big bear, a middle-sized bear, and a little wee bear, who all stared to see how a stranger had been making himself so much at home in their kennel. And first the big bear——"

"Cried out, '*Who has been eating up my porridge!*' wasn't it?" asked Nob.

"No such thing. He went to the cupboard to get Jack a bone."

"Oh, I say!" broke out Hob. "I am quite tired of this story. Tell us another one, about real wild beasts, or adventures with savage men."

Here Toby turned his tail upon the critical puppies and slipped back into his kennel, where he went on muttering and growling to himself. When they found that he had taken serious offence, they fell now to coaxing and flattering their old friend, trying to make him go on with his story.

"It's a splendid tale," said Hob, "only I want you to be quick and get to the fighting."

"Do tell us some more," begged Nob. "I am so anxious to know what the bears did to Jack."

But it was not for several minutes that Toby allowed himself to be persuaded to come out and finish his story. Then they became aware that all this time he had been going on with it to himself, so they had lost another piece of the young dog's adventures.

"You would have heard, if you had only been listening civilly," he began again, "how Jack was so lame from the thorn in his foot, that he lay down and whined for pain, till there came by a lad with a small bundle on his back, whistling cheerfully, but he stopped whistling when he saw Jack, for what is so sad a sight as a lame dog?"

"Jack at once limped up to him, holding out his hurt paw; then the lad was not long in seeing what was the matter, and cleverly pulled out the thorn; for men, my dears, whatever may be their inferiority in legs and tail, can do some things which we can't—never forget that!"

"As soon as he found himself free from the thorn, Jack began to gambol and frisk, barking joyfully round this new friend, as if to say that he took him for his master, out of gratitude and in want of a better.

"'Poor fellow!' said the lad, patting him kindly, 'there's little to get from me, for I am setting out into the world to seek my own fortunes. But let us stick together and help each other, as you seem a good dog, no better off than myself, perhaps.'

"So they travelled on in company, whistling and barking for glee; and Jack was not long of showing his master how

he could help him through the world. For that night he caught a rabbit, which they both had for supper; and the lad lay down to rest in better spirits and less hungry than since he had left home to seek his fortunes."

"His name was Richard—Richard Whittington?" Hob ventured to suggest.

"No, it wasn't, then. It was Dick, if you must know," frowned Toby.

"But did he not call himself the Marquis of Carabas?"

"Certainly not. That is quite another story."

"But shouldn't it have been a cat?" persisted Nob.
"And isn't there something about boots?"

"The boots are coming presently, but really I must have no more of these senseless interruptions. Next morning Jack and Dick set out early, and came to a river.

" 'Now you shall see how one good turn deserves another, if you will only do just as I tel' you,' said Jack to Dick, and made him take off his clothes and bathe in the river. Then, while he was bathing, there came by——"

"The king in his coach," Nob couldn't help putting in, but Toby silenced him with a look.

"My story is all new and original. There came by a prodigious giant with seven-leagued boots on, and a sword that always killed seven at a blow. As soon as the giant was within hearing, Jack began to howl out as plain as he could bark—

" 'Help! help! my master is being drowned.'"

“‘Is he good to eat?’ asked the giant, and at once took off his seven-leagued boots, and sword and things, that he might wade in after the drowning person.

“But as he went into the water, Dick scrambled out of it, made haste to slip on the giant’s boots, took his sword, also his cap of knowledge and his cloak—whoever wore which became invisible—snatched up his own bundle, and was off like a greyhound, with Jack at the heels of his faithful master, long before that stupid giant saw the trick that had been played on him.

“The two companions now travelled on at a great rate; and the seven-leagued boots soon brought them into a country infested by——”

“Rats!” whispered Hob, winking at Nob.

“By a great fiery dragon,” said Toby emphatically and severely. “If you know better than I do, I needn’t go on.” But as the puppies begged his pardon, he did go on.

“This dragon was in the way of eating up a score of children every morning, and even the dogs of the country were afraid of him. Many brave knights and noble hounds had set out to hunt him down, but hitherto without success, though the king had promised his daughter and half his kingdom to whoever should bring him the monster’s head. Of course Dick at once felt that this was the very chance for him to make his fortune; and Jack and he lost no time about going in search of the devouring dragon.

“Sir Dick, as he was now called because of being on the

hunt after knightly adventures, equipped himself for the combat with a horse and armour and spear and other weapons. But none of these things were of as much use to him as his valiant four-footed squire. This shows how men ought to be thankful to dogs, and make much of them, which indeed is the moral of my story.

"When they came to the dragon's den, Jack ran forward, barking loudly to rouse the fiery monster, which came out to fight as soon as it had time to light itself up. A terrible sight it was, breathing out fire and smoke from each nostril, tearing up the rocks as it rushed forward, and knocking down whole rows of trees at every swish of its enormous tail, blazing with fiery scales that kept going off like the squibs and crackers naughty boys play with on Guy Fawkes' day."

"Ha! This is something like a story now," said Hob, with both ears pricked up.

"I don't remember hearing anything quite like it before," agreed Nob.

"No wonder that Sir Dick's horse turned tail, and could not for all his spurring and gee-upping be brought to face such a formidable foe! But just as the dragon was about to swallow them both up, Jack ran in, biting and snarling at it from behind, so that it had to twist round upon this new assailant. Jack gallantly scampered away, with the dragon after him, thus saving the knight's life, who had been thrown over his horse's head, and saw nothing for it but to take to his seven-leagued boots."

"But why did he do nothing with that wonderful sword he got from the giant?" asked Hob.

"Then there was the cloak of darkness—you are forgetting that," added Nob; but Toby, looking his ugliest, went on with the story in his own way.

"Men are no good at all at hunting, without a dog to help them. While the young knight was taking breath, Jack ran, and the dragon flew till they came to the edge of a lake. The dog at once plunged in, and so did the dragon; but that was an end of it, for this fiery monster could not swim well, and the water soon put it out with a fizz and a splutter which made the whole lake boil. In as short a time as you could take to say *bow wow*, the dragon was drowned as dead as ever a litter of useless puppies, and Jack retrieved it, bringing its huge body to the bank, where Sir Dick quickly cut off its head and its tail. The tail he gave to Jack as a reward for his good conduct, and with the head he set off for the king's court, to claim the princess's hand and half the kingdom.

"I ought to tell you that out of the scales he made a collar for Jack, with a gold plate, on which was engraved—
'THIS IS THE BRAVEST DOG IN THE WORLD, THAT SLEW THE FIERY DRAGON.'

"When they reached the king's palace everybody who read this inscription thought it an honour to make friends with Jack, and all the court patted him and gave him things to eat, till a less modest and sensible dog's head would have

been turned by so much notice. The princess especially admired him, and said that she could not be happy till she had such a good dog for her very own. But the king was not so well pleased about giving his daughter's hand and half his kingdom to an unknown youth."

"H'm, I thought something of the sort was coming!" put in Hob, as Toby stopped for a moment to think what should come next. "I have heard a great many stories like that. The king tried to get off his bargain, and said that Dick must first perform three tasks which seemed impossible."

"But of course he contrived to accomplish them by the help of his clever and affectionate companion," added Nob.

"If you know all about it, what's the good of my telling you?" snarled Toby, as cross as a bull-dog. "I was not coming to that for a long time yet, and then my story would have ended quite differently. But there's no pleasing the puppies of this generation." *

He shut his eyes, and lay down sulkily with his big head between his paws. In vain, now, Hob and Nob tried to soothe his ruffled feelings.

"Do finish your nice tale. We promise not to say another word."

"Finish it yourselves!" muttered the old mastiff; and in a minute or two more was fast asleep; so that these puppies never heard what was the end of Jack and his master, Toby's tale being cut short as a terrier's.

The Man in the Moon.

BY MARY HOLDSWORTH.



THE Man in the Moon had been having fine games all the evening, sending the wind after the beautiful fleecy clouds to make them go faster, and then chasing the bright little stars in and out until they twinkled again with laughter. He was very fond of a joke, was the Man in the Moon ; but he was getting tired now, and wanted something new to amuse him. So there he was, his beaming face wreathed in smiles, peeping in through the curtains of the children's rooms, trying to wake them up by darting his soft silvery rays right into their faces, which was very wrong of him, you know, because by the time the Moon comes out on a summer evening it is quite time all good little boys and girls were in bed ; and as for the naughty ones, the less said about them the better.

Little Nellie had been in bed for an hour or more, trying hard to go to sleep ; but although she squeezed her hands tightly over her eyes to keep them shut, she could not help peeping through her fingers just to see if her old friend the Man in the Moon were looking down and smiling at her. It

was quite a pleasure to see his bright face shining up in the sky ; only what puzzled her was, how he got there. Nursie used to say it was a punishment for gathering sticks on a Sunday ; but Nellie could not believe that, because if he were in disgrace for being naughty he would not laugh and look so jolly.

“When I am put in the corner for playing with Pussy instead of learning my lessons I always cry, so it’s very clear he is not in disgrace,” thought Nellie. “I think he must be put up there to take care of the stars and the clouds, and to send down the rain when it is needed.”

As she watched his broad, shining face peeping in through her window, she kept repeating to herself—

“The Man in the Moon came down too soon
To ask the way to Norwich;
He went to the South and burnt his mouth
With eating cold pease-porridge.”

Only, why did he want to come down to Norwich, she wondered ; it was much nicer being in the Moon. If he had wanted to come down to London, now, she could have understood him—but Norwich ! And how could he burn his mouth with eating *cold* pease-porridge ? “The person who wrote that piece of poetry made a mistake,” reflected Nellie, who ought to know if anyone knew, for had she not made fourteen mistakes in her dictation that very morning, and been obliged to write them all out correctly and learn them ?

"Why do you not come up to the Moon to see me, little Nellie, and then I would tell you all about it?" said the Man in the Moon.

"I only wish I could," answered Nellie, "but I don't know how."

"It's the easiest thing in the world," said the Man in the Moon. "You just shut your eyes and hold your breath hard, and up you go like a bird. That was how I got up."

So Nellie did as she was bid; shut her eyes as tightly as she could, and held her breath until her rosy cheeks nearly burst; for once before she had nearly gone up to the ceiling while she held her breath, and it was ever so much nicer to go up to the moon. Up, up she went, over the houses, above the tall chimney tops—higher than the waving trees and the Church spires, the soft wind blowing her gently along. It must have looked very funny, I think, to see a little girl in a white night-gown, with long fair hair streaming in the breeze, and cheeks puffed out like ripe peaches, flying through the air like that. On, on she went, up among the beautiful clouds—grey, pink, primrose and green—for one of the moon's greatest pleasures was to make the clouds lovely with his rays; and there were all the merry little stars popping out to look at her—and no wonder, for it was not often they saw such a sight.

As for the Man in the Moon, he was delighted to have a visitor, for "You see, my dear," he said, "people don't often

come to see me because they can't hold their breath long enough."

But it was well worth the trouble, Nellie decided, as she rested herself after her long flight, and drank some sweet refreshing dew brought to her by a pretty pink cloud. It was so nice to be up there, looking down on the world below, so busy when Nellie saw it by day, but now so quiet with the few people who were walking about looking, not like mice, as some of the books tell us, but rather like flies or ants, so small were they.

And then the Man in the Moon took her all amongst the twinkling stars; it was much better than fireworks, she decided; and when she began to feel cold he sent for some little clouds to cover her—soft, fleecy clouds, as warm as cotton wool. "Oh," thought Nellie, "I never knew before why mother calls her white shawl a cloud." And he told her lovely stories about things he had seen when people had no idea that he was looking on. I should like to tell you some of them, too, only it would take too long.

And then, as it was long past supper-time, and Nellie was beginning to get hungry, the Man in the Moon took her to his cupboard, and gave her some delicious cake and green cheese to eat. It was so nice! Much nicer than that she was allowed to have in her nursery when she gave dinner-parties to her dolls.

At last, after chatting a long time, little Nellie's eyes began to grow weary—she had been awake so many hours,

you know; so the Man in the Moon sent her home again on one of the nice soft clouds. Down, down, down she went, back again to the earth, below the stars and all the clouds. First the tall Church-steeple came into view, then the tree-tops and the chimneys, and then at last there was Nellie's own little room, just as she had left it.

Nellie gave just one last look out of her sleepy blue eyes at the Man in the Moon, who was smiling up in the sky as broadly as ever, before she dropped off into a sound sleep, which lasted until the sun touched her eyelids with his warm beams in the morning.

This is a true story, because Nellie herself told me all about it the next day; and there, sure enough, was a piece of the green cheese given to her by the Man in the Moon himself out of his own cupboard. And if it did not come from the Man in the Moon, why, then, pray where *did* it come from?

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Joanie's Photograph.

BY MRS. E. M. FIELD,

AUTHOR OF "MIXED PICKLES," ETC.



FATHER put it in a frame yesterday, and hung it at the foot of my bed. He said it should hang there to remind me to put a check upon my imagination.

Miss Everard says if she were in my place she would not want it there for an object lesson. I don't think it is an object, and I heard father say to mother once that there was a great deficiency of imagination about Miss Everard. I don't quite understand what he meant, but I know there is no imagination about the photograph and its story, for it really happened.

Before I tell you the story, I must tell you what the photograph is like. It is a picture of our garden, which is the prettiest garden in all the world, I think, though Bertie says if it's quite certain the animals, and especially the white bears, were not in cages in Adam and Eve's garden, he thinks he might have liked that one quite as well. You can only see part of the garden in the photograph though,

because it shews a piece of the house, two windows of the dining-room and one of the study, with the broad steps coming down to the path. The people on the steps are Aunt Katie's wedding party, with a very white space where her wedding dress came, and Uncle Ernest smiling with the sun in his eyes. I am at the left hand corner, and the blot beside me is Bertie—he would bring Tabitha into the picture, and as she *wouldn't* keep still he *couldn't*, so Bertie came out with at least three heads. But now comes the curious part of the picture. In the end window of the dining-room you can see a face looking out from between the curtains. It is the face of a person who did not intend to be photographed at all, and he was sorry that it was such a good likeness, though everyone else was very glad. You never could guess how that could be unless you heard the story.

It was Bertie who told me first that Uncle Ernest was going to marry Aunt Katie. He sleeps in a little room next the nursery, and he heard the maids talking before he went to sleep. It was just getting light next morning when the door opened, and in pattered Bertie in his night-shirt, with Tabitha hugged very tightly in his arms, and he whispered, "Are you awake, Joan?"

"Yes, very," I said, though I know that wasn't grammar, and I am afraid it wasn't quite true.

"Because," he said, "I've come to tell you something, and I'm not sure if you'll like it. Mr. Merton is going to marry Aunt Katie, and take her away to his house. It's by

the sea, so they can build sand castles, but nurse says it's a desolate place, with a moor at the back, and a creek that's alive with rats. And he's a widower, and forty if he's a day, but Mary says he's a perfect gentleman, and never gives a florin for half-a-crown."

I was quite awake by this time, and sitting up in bed. Bertie curled himself and Tabitha up at the foot of the bed; she shut her eyes to purr, he opened his very wide.

"Bertie," I said, "this is really very serious. I know Mr. Merton has had designs for some time." I said this because I suddenly understood what nurse meant when she said the same thing. Using long words to Bertie now and then keeps him in order.

Bertie and I talked this news over very seriously, and the more we talked the more I felt we must do something. Father liked Mr. Merton so much we were sure he wouldn't interfere, and mother is so unselfish, though what she would do without Aunt Katie on one of her bad days we could not imagine.

"No one would tell us fairy tales," said Bertie.

"You shouldn't be so selfish as to think of that," I said. "Father says the thing to consider is always the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

"Well, we're a greater number than Mr. Merton," said Bertie.

"We are. And he's so old. Bertie, Aunt Katie could only marry him out of pity, and she'll be miserable with him."

"Like Bluebeard's wife?" said Bertie, with eyes like saucers.

"Well, I don't think he's so bad as that," I said. "But we must prevent it, and we will."

"How?" said Bertie.

I thought a little, and I remembered what nurse had told me happened in one of her places. Nurse has had a great deal of experience from living in so many different places.

"The plan is," I said, "to be very cold, and stiff, and disagreeable, so that the person sees you don't want him for an uncle, or whatever it is. When he speaks to you you must hardly answer, and you must not think of climbing on his knee, Bertie."

"I do like that funny thing on his chain that turns round," said Bertie, "and I'm afraid we shall be scolded for being rude."

"As if that mattered when you are doing a heroic action," I said. "Don't you understand, Bertie? We have to rescue Aunt Katie from a cruel oppressor. When the people nurse knew did that, the gentleman wrote his own self a letter, saying he must come at once on important business, and they never saw him again. But, above all, you *must* keep the secret, Bertie, and I'm so afraid you won't. You never could keep one."

"I couldn't when I was five," Bertie said; "I'm six now, and besides, I kept your Christmas present secret for a whole fortnight."

Bertie pattered away, and I lay thinking how splendid it would be to be able to save Aunt Katie from a wretched fate. That is the one thing that always makes me sorry to have been born a girl; I should so very much like to have been a boy, especially in the middle ages, so as to ride forth and right all the wrongs in the world. If you were a girl in those days you could generally only *be* rescued, which would not be half so fine, but girls sometimes did dress up as pages and go forth, and sometimes they hid fugitives and fed them. I would give all I have in the world, even the gold watch mother keeps safe for me, to be able to do a heroic action. I was glad even to be able to save Aunt Katie, and I must have fallen asleep while I thought about it, for I was dreaming of a dragon with a long shiny green tail and Mr. Merton's face, while nurse, dressed as a herald, was blowing a trumpet, and proclaiming "He's forty if he's a day," when I found nurse standing by me, saying it was time to get up.

Bertie and I behaved like two icicles at breakfast. Mother looked surprised, but Uncle Ernest—Mr. Merton—only looked amused. We found him in the garden with Aunt Katie at twelve o'clock, and he invited us to ride on his shoulder, but we kept as far off as possible, and Bertie did very well till after lunch. Then he forgot, and when he had said his grace he ran round and jumped on Mr. Merton's knee.

"Well, young man, so you've come back to your old friend!" said Mr. Merton, and Bertie got very red and tried to scramble down; but Mr. Merton held him tight.

"How have I had the misfortune to displease either of your little High Mightinesses?" he asked. "As for Miss Joanie, she has done nothing but look daggers, or at least penknives, at me."

I made a warning face at Bertie, but he burst out—

"It's because Joanie says Aunt Katie will be miserable if she marries you, and you live on a desolate moor with a leak full of rats, and you're forty if you're a day, and only a widower. And there are five of us that want her, counting baby, as he'll care more when he's bigger, and you're only one. But if you can't possibly do without her, then please will you take Tabitha too, as she won't be lonely nor mind the rats, and she'll stay with you if you butter her paws and——"

Bertie was going on very fast, without any stops and with his eyes tight shut to help him to remember what he wanted to say. But I saw mother looking horrified and Aunt Katie quite scarlet, and Mr. Merton and father burst into a roar of laughter.

Uncle Ernest was not angry; he left off laughing at last and told Bertie he would butter Aunt Katie's paws as soon as he got her home, and we should pay him a visit and learn the difference between a creek and a leak. Mother talked to me very seriously afterwards about not letting my imagination run away with me, and Aunt Katie said she really *liked* to marry Uncle Ernest.

So I couldn't rescue her. But I was so disappointed, it

made me long all the more to do some heroic act, and at night when I lay in bed I had to make up long stories about myself and different victims and persecuted people, especially as Aunt Katie had not much time for telling us stories now.

The wedding day came at last, and there was a great bustle, so that Bertie and I were sent into the garden to be out of the way; the wedding was to be in the afternoon. Bertie took out Tabitha with him.

"Let's play at a wedding," he said; "Tabitha shall be Aunt Katie, we can easily pretend her black tail is a white silk one."

"I won't indeed," I said, I was so unhappy at losing Aunt Katie that it made me cross. "That ugly black thing, our dear, pretty Auntie!" and I walked off down the path with my head very high. I heard a sound like a laugh and a howl with a sneeze in the middle behind me, and I knew that I had hurt Bertie's feelings. But I wouldn't turn back, I went straight on down the hill to Lady Mabel's Bower, which is a lovely bit of wood with a pond in it, telling myself a story in which I was a lady of the middle ages who dressed up as a page, and followed her lord to the crusades, and shielded him from many dangers. I was just telling how the knight found her out and knelt before her on one knee and took her lily-white hand (only it would have been rather hard and brown from wielding a sword) and he said, "Fairest Ladye, to thee I owe my life," and kissed it, and I had just kissed my own hand to see how it felt, when I looked up and saw

that someone was near and must have heard and seen me.

A gentleman was sitting on the soft moss, cruelly knocking off the dear bluebells' heads with his stick. He was very well dressed and had a large dark moustache. I said with all the dignity I could—

"I am afraid you are trespassing. These are our private grounds." He sat where he was, but lifted his hat very politely, as if I had been quite grown up, and said—

"I beg ten thousand pardons, madam." Madam, he called me. "I thought," he said, "that weary limbs and a weary heart might rest a little in this quiet spot."

He looked at me with great blue eyes that seemed almost to have tears in them. I saw directly that here was really a person in trouble.

"*Are you weary?*" I said. "Are you obliged to flee away, and take refuge here? Because, if you are, of course that is quite different." •

"A—yes," he said slowly, "quite different. But," and he gave a great sigh, "I must go away; there is no help for it, since I am trespassing."

He lifted his hat again to let the soft air blow upon his forehead, and I saw that his hair curled beautifully when it was long enough. I was sure it had been cut to conceal his flight; he only wanted long love locks, and a lace collar, to look exactly like the picture of the cavalier in our hall.

"Are you really a fugitive?" I said, "with tyrants hunting you with bloodhounds? You could swing yourself from tree

to tree here, and escape them like Robert Bruce did."

"Ah," he said, "it's human bloodhounds I have to fear. Well, little lady, it would be something if you wouldn't mention having seen me hereabouts. Not that you could keep a secret long, I suppose."

I felt myself flush up hotly. The idea of not being able to keep a secret, especially when it meant life or death to someone else! An idea struck me, too. I drew myself up and said—

"If you will trust yourself to me I will hide you for a day or two, till your pursuers have given up hunting for you. Our house is splendid for that, with the vaults underneath."

"Vaults, eh?" he said; he got up and leaned against a tree. I saw what a fine man he was when he stood.

"Well, they are really cellars now," I said. "Father says they are not really old, but they were made because all the stone to build the house was quarried out from underneath. We call them the catacombs, and Bertie and I play early Christians there when we can steal some candle ends. Only Bertie cries if they go out, but I like the dark. But when Cousin Frank was here in the holidays we played Inquisition with masks and macintoshes, and Frank borrowed Aunt Katie's curling tongs, and tortured my doll Rose till he melted her arm, and I haven't been able to like him so much since. Perhaps the Inquisition are after you?" I said, feeling quite afraid I ought not to talk of it, for certainly he had a dark moustache just like a Spaniard.

"A—yes," he said, "the Inquisition, certainly; that's it. And you think you could shelter me in your house, missie?"

"I think——" then a horrid feeling of fear and doubt came over me with a cold shiver, and I stopped short.

The fugitive looked at me with his sad blue eyes.

"As I thought," he said to the air. "She is afraid her mamma will scold her."

What a thought to come into a heroic deed! I could not stand that. "I KNOW I can," I said, "if you will trust to me, only you must come at once before the wedding guests arrive." I felt very proud as I led him through the shrubby paths to the door that leads to the cellars, just beyond the back door of the house. It was very lucky that we met no one, and the maids were at work in the kitchen with the door shut. We groped our way down in the dark and I left him there while I ran upstairs for a basket, and put in it some biscuits and a whole candle; the ends seemed hardly fit for a real fugitive. I took the "Arabian Nights" too to amuse him, but ran back to change it, as it did not seem quite kind to give him stories in which when people are in trouble a genie always appears to save them, and there wasn't any underground passage from our cellars to the sea-shore. I changed it for the "Pilgrim's Progress," and really when I had settled my fugitive—he told me his name was Ivo Galahad de Vere—in one of the cellars that has a door to it, it looked such a splendid refuge that I quite wanted to

stay with him. But I had heard Jane calling, and I knew I must hurry away.

"Shall I lock you in?" I said. "It would be safer, and I will bring you food by-and-bye. No one ever does come down here, but still it might——" Then I nearly screamed, for Ivo de Vere strode with his martial step across the cellar, and seized my arm in a grip that hurt me, and hissed between his teeth as people do in the stories Jane reads ;

"If you dare to betray me, if you dare to say a word about my being here, I will bring such a vengeance upon you and your family——"

I choked down the lump that rose in my throat. "How can you think such a thing? How *can* you?" I said.

"No," he said, grandly, "I don't think it. Young as you are, I trust you."

He locked himself in, and I saw his light twinkle faintly through the key-hole before I left the cellars. Jane was very cross and hurried, and pulled my hair terribly with the comb. I could not say anything about it, I felt too heroic; but Bertie told Jane he liked her less than anything in all the world, even less than a blackbeetle.

It seemed quite odd to me to see all the beautifully-dressed ladies in the church, and the gentlemen with very large cuffs and pale-coloured gloves, and flowers in their coats. It would have seemed to me so much more natural if the men had worn doublets and hose and a sword at their side, or armours, and the ladies ruffs and long veils like Aunt Katie's.

None of them guessed that I was hiding a fugitive, just as if it were in the middle ages. I wondered what they would think if they knew. When we came home in a great many carriages my thoughts were so full of my heroic deed, that when I was asked what Bertie and I had given Aunt Katie, I said "a Torture Rack," instead of a Toast Rack, and I got quite frightened when Major Fowler pinched my cheek and said he was sure I could tell him a secret if I tried.

Bertie and I had to "Come and say How do you do?" and stand up to show how much we had grown, so many times that I could not get away to Ivo de Vere; and then father came in a hurry and said we must all be photographed before the bride went away. Even the servants had to come, and Bertie brought Tabitha; she was not to go with Aunt Katie after all, as mother thought a toast rack would really be a more useful present.

It made me feel quite sad to think of my poor Fugitive down there in the dark, hearing all the merry voices. I thought he could just peep out through a tiny hole there was very high up in the dungeon—I mean the cellar. The instant the photographer had finished I ran off as fast as I could, I would not stop to fetch a candle, but blundered down into the catacombs, and as I went my silk frock caught in a nail and I heard a dreadful sound like *scrr-rish*.

I don't know why, but at the foot of the stairs I felt horribly frightened. I stood still, and heard my own heart beating. I looked for the glimmer of light in the key-hole,

but there was none. I groped my way to the door; it was wide open, and when I called quietly no one answered. I turned and fled then, in a way that was not at all heroic, and I tripped and fell flat on the slimy floor. Oh that new silk frock! Somehow or other I got to the top of the stairs, and came tearing round to the lawn, blinking in the sun, and with my soiled frock and a face that I know was pale and scared.

But I *was* surprised to see all the other people looking pale too, and all talking at once. I heard bits of what they said. "All Katie's valuable presents gone, and all the silver from the tea-table; nothing left but a few plated things—dreadful business—where are the police?"

Then father's voice. "The photographer has just looked at his negative, and he says there is a face looking out between the dining-room curtains, pale, with a dark moustache. Has anyone seen such a person?" As he spoke father suddenly caught sight of my face. "Why, Joanie, child, what is the matter? Look, mother, is she ill? Yes, the police are on his track already," he went on, for half a dozen voices asked questions at once. Aunt Katie came out of the house with her bonnet on, and the pretty blue dress I had longed to see her wear. I didn't look at it now. I rushed into her arms, all muddy as I was, and told her it was all, *all* my fault that her pretty things were gone. I did not know till then how unhappy one could feel—nor half how kind and sweet Aunt Katie is.

But she didn't lose her pretty things. The police caught the fugitive, he really was one now, at the railway station, and I had to "identify" him. The moustache was only stuck on, and the hair that curled so prettily was a wig—his own was red. And his name was Thomas Jones.

Father says the photograph is to keep a check on my imagination. I asked him whether I had not better try and get rid of it altogether, but he said, "No, no, little woman, the world would be a dull place indeed without imagination—no pictures, no music, no poems, no stories."

"Oh," I said, "if these are the kind of stories it makes I don't want to be *in* one."

"Well, there is even a bright side to that," said father; "we will write it down, and perhaps some other children will enjoy it."

As for the heroic deeds, father says there are some even now to be done. But this story is not about one; I am only too sure of that.

The Rats of the Linden Platz.

BY FANNY BARRY,

AUTHOR OF "SOAP BUBBLE STORIES," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE Burgomaster's house was large and old-fashioned. It stood on the Linden Platz, with its great sloping red roof and stone-mullioned windows. Over the door was the carved escutcheon of some bygone owner, and the door itself was so ponderous and nail-studded that the Burgomaster's little son, Otto, could scarcely push it open when he went out to school with his deer-skin satchel over his shoulder.

In front of the house was a square with a fountain in the middle; surrounded by linden trees, which shielded the old houses affectionately from the glare and modern bustle of the new town.

All inside the house was old. The panelled walls, the quaint furniture, the uneven polished floors, the curious china. It had all belonged to the Burgomaster's grandfather. Even the very Rats in the great kitchen—where

you might have hidden fifteen men comfortably up the chimney—were the descendants of the Rats who had lived there since the year 1540 ; and very proud they were of their ancestry.

Under the boards of the kitchen, and behind the wainscoting, there was a regular Rat-colony, living in small but neat houses, which in process of time they had furnished with everything necessary for comfort.

As a rule, life flowed on evenly in the Rat-households. The Burgomaster's cook had a kindly habit of leaving scraps about on the kitchen table, and the cupboards and larders were very accessible ; but a few years after the birth of the Burgomaster's only son, a terrible quarrel took place which divided the entire society into two factions.

A party of enterprising Rats rose up and openly defied the Rat-Council—which had administered justice from the retirement of a large jam cupboard, from time immemorial.

They were immediately exiled ; and left their homes, carrying their household effects in procession, braving it out to the last, and declaring that they wished to see a little modern life, and greatly preferred the attics.

The move had to be conducted by night, and it was many hours before all the stools, tables, and beds, were dragged across the kitchen, and conveyed up the wide stairs to their new quarters.

The Refugees—who were headed by an aged companion, the Rath-Inspector Sausen—soon settled down in their

new houses. These, though more retired than their old homes, were still not far from Otto's bedroom, where candle-ends, biscuits, and pieces of cake could be conveniently secured with safety; but a terrible feud raged between the two colonies, and the outlaws never missed an opportunity of revenging themselves.

The houses of the Kitchen-Rats were mysteriously robbed at night, their provisions stolen, their best furniture broken up. Nothing was safe from hour to hour.

The Rat-Council secretly wished it had not been so severe in its judgment. Perhaps the affair might have been patched up; but now it was evidently too late to make Peace overtures.

The anniversary of the building of the houses in the Linden Platz was approaching; a great festival, kept by the Rat families with much rejoicing.

Everything good was saved up for this occasion, and a supper given in the Rath-haus,—a panelled room behind the larder—where the Rat-Council assembled in robes of state, with their small gold chains of office; and even the humblest Rat family had seats provided for it at the long trestle tables.

A Council of "ways and means" was always held some days before the festival, to arrange the *ménu*; and on this occasion the Councillors met earlier than usual, in order to settle the patrols, and the means of defence.

This had become necessary after the quarrel; for only the year before, the supper had been completely spoiled by the sudden appearance of the refugees in black crape masks,

armed with sticks and carving-knives, who promptly fell upon the table, and cleared off everything eatable, before the revellers could recover themselves.

Everyone recognized the old Rath-Inspector Sausen, in his peaked felt hat, with an ancient blunderbuss under one arm, but the faces of his followers were so completely disguised it was impossible to tell one from the other.

"I declare this meeting open, Councillors," said the President, as he sat on a chair of state at the head of the Council table, "and I would suggest that we first select our *ménu*, and then make the arrangements for our self-defence."

"Hear! hear!" cried the Councillors, who were anxious to finish as soon as possible.

"What do you say to white soup, cheese soufflé, bread pudding, and tallow candle?"

"Excellent!" cried the Councillors, "could not be better," and they clapped their hands enthusiastically.

"Double guards at each door, and at the ends of all the passages, to be fed afterwards in the banquetting hall with double rations," suggested the President.

"Hear! hear!" shouted the Councillors, "long live the Linden Platz! down with usurpers!"

"Where shall we get the candle?" enquired a practically-minded Councillor, who liked to have everything settled with exactitude.

"From Herr Otto's bedroom," said the President, "nothing easier. He goes up at nine every night. The banquet is

not till eleven. I am sorry to say our present cook is getting very grasping. She shuts up everything in tin boxes. A disagreeable suspicious nature, which has always been particularly objectionable to me."

"She ought to be ashamed of herself," said the practical Councillor. "Let us move a vote of censure."

"Carried!" cried the others, and the meeting dissolved amidst loud stampings.

CHAPTER II.

While the preparations for the banquet were proceeding downstairs, the Rat families in the attics were not idle.

They had held five meetings with closed doors, and six open-air gatherings, to discuss what should be done to harass their enemies.

Spies were sent out disguised as stranger Rats from the Linden Platz, and they soon returned with full details of the Rat-Council's arrangements.

"We must employ craft here," said the Rath-Inspector thoughtfully. "I will now put on my hat, and go into the matter thoroughly."

He placed his felt hat on his head, and remained silent for five minutes, while the other Rats looked on respectfully.

"We will go," commenced Herr Sausen in a deep voice, folding his arms, and pulling his hat brim over one eye, "in

the dead of night—say half-past nine or thereabouts—and we will take Herr Otto's candle before the others can get at it. They intended to fetch it about ten, I understand. When they come *it will be gone!*"

The Rath-Inspector finished dramatically, with an abrupt pause and a stamp of the right foot.

The outlawed Rats twirled their moustaches fiercely, and felt that a bold and daring spirit was indeed at the head of them.

"Is it to-night?" they enquired eagerly.

"It is," replied Herr Sausen. "Eat little to-day, and put new points to your walking-sticks. You will require your best energies for this evening."

"Do we go masked?" enquired a young Rat, nervously.

"We do," said the Rath-Inspector. "See to it that the strings tie firmly;" and with great dignity he placed his tail over his arm, and disappeared through the front door of his dwelling house.

At half-past nine it was already dark, for it was late autumn. The Conspirators gathered, silently by the top of the attic staircase; their female relations carrying lanterns, and begging them with tears, to be careful not to expose themselves to unnecessary dangers.

Each outlaw was masked, the Rath-Inspector wore his pointed hat, and though the knees of some of the younger members appeared to quiver slightly, everyone tried to look as warlike as possible.

"Good-bye! Good luck!" cried the Rat-mothers, waving their handkerchiefs as the expedition started down the steps.

The elder Rats responded cheerfully, but the feebler natures pretended their masks were scratching their faces, and stooped down to loosen the strings.

Arrived at the door of Otto's bedroom, they entered cautiously.

Evidently he was already asleep, and all was quiet in the Linden-haus.

They pushed open the door, which was unlatched, and crept in on tip-toe, looking round anxiously, for in every shadowy corner they fancied a Kitchen-Rat might be lurking.

"Swarm up the table-leg, and mount the candlestick," whispered Herr Sausen. "Lower the candle steadily, and two of you be ready to catch it if it slips down. I will give the word, and superintend the thing myself."

With noiseless steps the Rats crawled on to the table, gazing furtively from side to side.

The movements of the Rath-Inspector were somewhat hampered by his large hat, which kept tilting over his eyes, and almost blinding him; but with some help from his companions he managed to climb up, and with animated gestures directed the lifting of the candle from its socket, and its final removal on the shoulders of ten of the strongest of the Rat-colony.

"I will walk in front," said the Rath-Inspector; "there is a great deal of danger to be apprehended in that quarter."



"ON THE SHOULDERS OF TEN OF THE STRONGEST OF THE RAT-COLONY."

The Rats who were struggling behind, groaned disbelievingly, and pushed so hard at the candle, in order to hurry forward, that the tallow cracked in the middle, and the greatest caution had to be employed by those in the centre, to prevent it dividing in half and falling down noisily.

The Rat-mothers, the daughters, and even the children in pinafores, were waiting at the bottom of the attic staircase to receive their relations; the candle was carried up in triumph, and preparations immediately made for a public feast in honour of the occasion.

"I have sent down two of our trusty Rats disguised as Dormice," said Herr Sausen, as he sat down complacently to the supper party; "they are to sit in a crack behind Otto's bedstead, and report progress—the Rat-Council will be *blue* with rage. If they tear the candlestick to pieces they won't find a scrap of grease there!"

CHAPTER III.

The Burgomaster's wife went into her son's room on her way upstairs. She had a headache that evening, and so was earlier than usual.

On seeing that Otto was already asleep, she tidied the room a little, and looked to see what had become of the candle—but it could not be found anywhere.

"Those tiresome Rats!" she said to herself, angrily. "I

constantly have to provide candles for this room, and just as often do I find they have been taken! I declare I will go downstairs and consult the Burgomaster."

"Put a candle in a mouse-trap," said the Burgomaster, who was in his study absorbed in official business, and did not want to be interrupted.

The Burgomaster's wife had only that day bought a large new mouse-trap. She got it out of the cupboard, and, with the aid of a pair of scissors, she poked in a large piece of tallow-candle.

"They always seem worse in Otto's room than anywhere else," she thought. "I will put it on the table by the side of the candlestick, and go in early in the morning to see what has happened to it."

The disguised Rats behind the wainscot, had listened eagerly to what she said; and following her downstairs, they heard the Burgomaster's advice, and saw her go to the cupboard to fetch the mouse-trap.

They did not wait for anything more, but flew upstairs in a panic, dropping their disguise in scraps as they galloped along. They burst into the room in which the Rath-Inspector was presiding at supper, and fell down trembling in a heap before him.

"What is this?" said Herr Sausen severely. "What disrespectful behaviour!"

In shaking tones the two Rats related what had occurred, while the Rath-Inspector's hair bristled with excitement.

"Audacious!" he cried. "So they have begun mouse-traps! One can scarcely believe in such meanness. They actually grudge us their miserable candle-ends. But we must out-wit them. We can never allow our race to be the victims of these avaricious creatures! Though we have quarrelled with the Rat-Council, we must save them."

There was a storm of applause from his companions, who rose to their feet cheering vigorously.

"Come, come!" said Herr Sausen briskly. "Ten volunteers to go with me to the Kitchen-Rats, and five to lie in wait in Otto's bedroom. We must give warning in all directions."

Twenty Rats rose eagerly, and the Rath-Inspector set off at once with his detachment for the kitchen.

"Lift your tails well off the ground and step softly," said Herr Sausen in a hoarse whisper.

He had tied a scrap of calico on the end of a walking-stick, and carried it in front of him as a flag of truce; for his recent visits to the kitchen had not been of a kind that would make the Rat-Council ready to receive him hospitably.

He knocked at the Rath-haus door, behind the larder, and was immediately answered by a Black-beetle, who sat in the front entrance to receive visitors.

"Will you call one of the Rat-Council?" said Herr Sausen, holding the white flag prominently before him.

• The Beetle looked cunning.

"What are you carrying your washing about on a clothes prop for?" he said slyly. "If you think we do ironing here, you're very much mistaken."

"It isn't washing," said the Rath-Inspector with dignity. "It's a flag of truce. I come on weighty business, and must see the Council immediately."

The Black-beetle banged the door and scuffled off; soon returning with five Kitchen-Rats armed to the teeth, who demanded Herr Sausen's business.

They seemed scarcely to believe in the story of the mouse-trap. One Councillor remarked in an audible whisper, "that such things *had* been known as Plots and Ambushes"—and it was not till the Rath-Inspector offered to go up with a strong guard to Otto's bedroom, and prove the truth of his statement, that the Rat-Council decided to venture out of their stronghold; and surrounding the flag of truce in a compact mass, they went up the oak staircase.

* * * * *

There was no doubt about the mouse-trap. There it stood, large and ponderous, with the piece of tallow-candle, and its mouth yawning to receive its victims.

The Kitchen-Rats gasped for breath, and some of the younger members almost fainted.

The President of the Rat-Council seized Herr Sausen round the neck, and embraced him warmly.

"Let all be forgotten and forgiven!" he said with emotion.

"You have saved our lives, for who knows which of us might have been the sacrifice? Consent to return to the kitchen! What do you say, my friends?" and he turned to his followers.

"Yes! yes!" shouted the crowd, while the Rath-Inspector wiped away a few tears, and pulled his hat over his brow still more rakishly.

"Do you consent, my children?" he asked, drawing his companions on one side.

"We do! We do!" cried the Garret-Rats eagerly. "Let us go back, far away from the regions of mouse-traps!"

"Then come down at once, and let us all have supper together," cried the President. "You can move the furniture to-morrow."

The suggestion was carried out.

The Garret-Rats hastily tidied themselves, put on clean collars, and a few ornaments; and trooped downstairs merrily to the hall behind the larder.

Here they sat up till long past midnight; and ended with a dance, in which the President of the Rat-Council asked for the honour of a Polonaise with Frau Sausen; and the Rath-Inspector danced so vigorously with the wives of all the chief Councillors, that he could scarcely move for days afterwards.

The Burgomaster's wife, on going into Otto's bedroom in the morning, found the mouse-trap empty; and Otto himself awake and examining it eagerly.

"Oh, mother! do promise me never to put one of these horrible things in my room again!" he cried. "The Rats are always so quiet and well behaved—some of them are quite friendly with me!"

And because Otto was an only son, and the Burgomaster's wife could not bear to deny him anything, she promised.

Bell Flowers.

BY EMMA WOOD.

TWO little maids were wandering one day in a leafy Dell with their arms twined round each other, talking evidently about something very important, which turned out to be their flower gardens.

"I mean to have a Fern in my garden, Polly!"

"They cost too much," said Polly; "Mother bought one the other day and it cost four shillings. It was called a Maiden-hair Fern."

"Oh, but," said the other child, who was named Muriel, "I don't mean to have a coddled-up *little girl* Fern that will only live in a house, but I am going to have a real *grown-up* Fern; and it *must* be grown-up because it is called Lady Fern—and it won't cost anything, and if you won't tell, I'll tell you where I can get it."

"Oh, do show me where it is!" said Polly.

And then, in a mysterious whisper, Muriel said—

"Why, in this very Dell. Come here, but *don't speak loud*, as I don't want it to know I'm going to take it away. Jack says I must wait until it goes to sleep in the autumn, and

then he will bring a spade and move it with a lot of earth, and it will never find out it has been moved until it wakes up in the spring and finds itself in my garden. *Won't it be fun?* ”

“ Oh, it will ! ” said Polly.

And then Muriel pushed aside some low-hanging branches, and nestling behind them was a lovely tall Lady Fern, though not fully dressed in her summer clothing, rising like a little Queen in the midst of her courtiers, for at its root, “ in sweet confusion,” bloomed the Dog-Violets keeping guard, and the pretty white and pink Wood-Anemones raising their delicate heads a little above them, like little maids of honour ; and then running all over were the tender Speedwells, with their gentle blue eyes, like the pets of the family, as if they knew they could never come amiss. All these, and more, were growing round the Lady Fern, mixed up with the light green foliage. The two children stood admiring speechlessly, and then Polly ejaculated—

“ Oh, how pretty ! but, Muriel, if you move the Fern you will spoil all the other blossoms.”

“ Oh, *that* won't matter,” said Muriel curtly, “ as there are heaps more in the wood those few will never be missed.”

“ *Poor* little flowers ! ” sighed Polly.

Just then a bell sounded through the trees, making the little girls start.

“ Oh, that's dinner ; we must run.” And away they scampered.

But I must tell you that a trailing bit of Ivy had heard all the children had said, and as it was rather inclined to be a busybody it hurried up to the Fern, who was having her afternoon sleep, and began whispering to the other flowers.

"So you're going to lose your Lady?"

"Don't know what you mean," they all chorussed.

"Then I'll tell you. You saw those two little girls just now?"

"Yes, we did."

"Well, they are going to fetch her away and put her in a garden."

"Don't care if they do," barked the Dog-Violets. "We shall go too."

"No you won't, because you are all going to be killed. I heard the little girl say so."

Just then a gust of wind blew the Ivy away, and then and there the trembling blossoms held a council of war. The Dog-Violets took the lead, as in their terror the white Anemones had turned whiter, and the pink Anemones had turned a deeper pink, and the little Speedwells' blue eyes seemed full of tears, while they sobbed and wailed, "Oh, dear! what *shall* we do?" and the echo seemed to come from the trees all round, "What shall we do?"

But the Dogs tried to lift up their heads and look fierce. At last one of them barked, "Give over crying, you silly little things. I've *thought* a *thought*."

A sudden hush pervaded the flowers, and they looked

up enquiringly; and then the Dog-Violet spoke again—

“We all love our Lady Fern, don't we?”

“We love her so,” they all sobbed; and the echo repeated, “Love her so.”

“Very well, then, we've nothing to do but to keep quiet and stick to her, and all will be right.”

“But they are going to *kill* us,” they whispered.

“Not at all, if you only do as I tell you; and we shall have a good season, too. We can go on flowering the same as usual, only we must not stray away, but we must wrap our roots round our dear Lady, so that when we go to sleep we shall be quite safe; and when that *cruel* little girl sends Jack with his spade he will dig *us* up, too, without knowing even that we are there, and when our dear Lady Fern wakes up in the spring she will find us all close to her, and *won't* that be fun.”

“*Won't* that be fun,” they all cried; and the echo answered, “Fun.”

Well, time went on, and the Lady Fern grew in beauty and height, and by degrees her little court kept disappearing in the ground, until she was left almost alone. She missed them very much, and wished that her time, too, had come to sleep, but she had a good many fronds yet to throw out before she could rest; and she knew they would be wanted to decorate the Church for the Harvest Thanksgiving, so she did her best to grow and spread, knowing her time was getting short, as some of her leaves were turning brown already.

Then one day she heard voices, and someone said, "Oh, look! that Fern gets more beautiful each year. For six autumns I have gathered leaves from it for the Altar," and then snip, snip, went some scissors, and most of the lovely long leaves were tenderly laid in a basket the girl carried on her arm, and the Fern knew that for that year her work was nearly done.

* * * * *

Time passed, and once more voices were heard in the Dell, but this time the Lady Fern had nearly dropped off to sleep, so she did not listen.

"Now Jack, bring your spade."

"All right, Miss; is this the Fern I'm to dig up?"

"Yes, this is it; will it kill it, do you think, Jack?"

"No, Miss, not if I take a lot of earth too."

"And do you think it will come up in my garden, Jack?"

"Certain sure of it, Miss: it will never feel being moved, or know anything about it."

And then he took his spade, and dug it out of the ground ever so deep, and carried it to Muriel's garden and there planted it, but neither he nor Muriel knew that the other loving little flowers were clinging to the root.

* * * * *

Winter came, and the snow came, and the cruel winds came, and still all the flowers lay fast asleep. But one day,

after a long long time, when the snowdrops and crocuses had been and gone, the Lady Fern unfurled some of her leaves and looked round and found herself in a strange land, and she felt very sad, and murmured, "They have taken me away from my pretty home and my dear little blossoms—Oh dear! what shall I do? I shall never see them any more—they are all gone;" and she fell to weeping and sighing. But just then she heard a sound of rippling laughter at her feet, and she glanced down, and there just as usual bloomed the Dog-Violets and the Wood-Anemones and the dear little Speedwells. They were all watching for her to awake, and they nodded their pretty heads and said, "Don't weep, dear Lady Fern, we are *all* here! we would come too because *we loved you so.*" And the echo repeated "Loved you so."

And when Muriel brought Polly to see her garden, and the Fern in the middle, Polly saw all the other flowers at the root, and she exclaimed—

"Oh, Muriel, I'm so glad you did not kill all those pretty flowers, as you said you should," and Muriel stared in mute astonishment; at last she said—

"I did not bring them, and I'm sure Jack did not. How *could* they come?"

"We all came together," they whispered, "because we loved her so."

And Polly said, pleadingly, "You won't kill them now, Muriel?"

"Oh, no, pretty little things, I won't; they shall all live together."

And the graceful Fern bowed her thanks, while the Dog-Violets snarled, "We did you *that* time, Miss Muriel;" but the Anemones said "Hush!" reprovingly, and the little Speedwells' blue eyes twinkled as they sang joyously,

"All's well that ends well."

And the echo said, "Well."

* * * *

"Always be faithful and true,
And never desert an old friend;
Though trouble may sometimes ensue,
It always repays in the end."

Between the Bars.

BY ANDREW HOME.

IT was growing dusk in the dining-room on this November afternoon, and Flossie could not see to read any longer. She had come to the room with her French grammar because there was no one else there to disturb her over the verb *craîndre*.

When there was no more light to be had from the window, she had lain down on the hearthrug before the brightly-burning fire, holding her book up so as to catch the glow upon the Imperfect Subjunctive, which is, let me tell you, an uncommonly awkward tense to get hold of. It was an undignified thing to do—this lying flat on the rug; but, then, Flossie was but ten years old, and, thank goodness, hadn't begun to think about dignity yet. It was remarkably trying for the eyes, too; and Flossie seemed to find it so, for she let *Mr. Chardenal* drop after a while and took to staring into the fire. Bother the subjunctive! Why couldn't everybody speak English and save all this trouble about "moods," and all the rest of it?

Now I hope that everybody who reads this has seen faces in

the fire. Some people, it seems, never have seen them ; and those are just the people who must not read any further, or they may be angry. Well, Flossie knew what faces in the fire were ; and just at this very moment, as she lay with her head on a hassock staring hard between the bars, quite a line of them appeared—a semi-circle—like a row of red Christy Minstrels. It was great fun to watch them ; much better fun than French verbs. And it was so beautifully snug, too, by the fire, and the hassock was so comfortable ; and it was so cosy, and warm, and jolly, watching the faces. For they were only faces, mind you, or rather, only heads. As though the Christy Minstrels were sitting in a long pew with a very high front to it, over which they could just get their chins.

As Flossie gazed, she was a trifle startled to hear her name called ; and to find that the sound came from the mouth of the face just in the very middle of the grate—a very old man he must be by the sound of his voice.

“Hullo, there !” he said, with a bit of a scrape in his throat, as though he had swallowed a cinder or two in his time. “Hullo, there ! Don’t you want to come in ?”

“Why,” said Flossie, surprised, “I *am* in—indoors, I mean.”

“Pooh !” said the old man, rather rudely, “that’s nothing. In **HERE**, between the bars, of course. Where else could it be ?”

“But I should get burnt. I did when I was roasting

chestnuts the other night. A cinder fell on to my finger, and I've got the blister now, and——"

"Nonsense!" said the old man, again impatiently; "I know all about that. You got burnt because you were *outside*, didn't you? And I asked you to come *inside*, didn't I?" Then he made a dreadful angry crunch with his mouth, which set all Flossie's teeth on edge.

"But I'm too big," she faltered, "there's no room for me."

"Oh, yes, there is—plenty. All you've got to do is to step on to the tiles, and there you are."

Still Flossie hesitated.

"Come now, *are* you coming?" shouted the old man, working himself up into such a white heat of passion that he had to mop the perspiration off his forehead.

"Yes, yes, I'll come," said Flossie, quite frightened by his severe manner.

She could hardly tell how it was done, but directly she was over the fender she found herself suddenly in a very strange place indeed. In point of fact, it was the Country Between the Bars.

Flossie had fancied it to be a very small place. She found it to be a very large one. The old man who had done all the talking was, she discovered, a great deal bigger than she was herself—as big as her father quite, and so were all his brethren, the Christy Minstrels, as she had called them. They were dressed like soldiers, all in red; and instead, as she had fancied, of sitting up in a long pew

or on a row of chairs, they were all lying flat on their chests and stomachs, with their long legs stretched out behind them, only their heads squinting out between the bars. This explains why it is that you can never see more than the faces when you look into the fire. The point was cleared up to Flossie's entire satisfaction.

"Now," said the old man, "now you're reasonable ; glad to see you ;" and he shook hands. "All my brothers are glad to see you too, only they can't say so. They can't speak till I'm gone. Very good rule, or we should be all talking at once. Don't feel at all too warm, do you ?"

"No," said Flossie, pleased with her kind reception, "not at all." Which was quite true, though most surprising.

"Now I'm going to show you a few things," said the old man ; "we'll leave these other fellows in charge. But first, I'd better tell you my name—I know yours already. Mr. Best Brights, at your service ; cousin, I may remark, to the Duke of Wallsend, and Lord Kilburne."

"Oh !" said Flossie, very much impressed.

"Now give me your hand," Mr. Brights went on in his bustling way, "and don't try to be staring back through the bars as you call 'em, for you'll see nothing however hard you try. I notice you've left your book open there on the rug. Your books and your papers don't take us in," he went on with a grin ; "and we have to swallow a good many. Dry stuff, dry stuff, most of 'em. Why don't you light the fires

with a *Punch*, now and then, to cheer us up a bit with a few jokes—hey ? ”

They were walking on all this while through the strangest country Flossie had ever seen. When she told me afterwards about her adventure, she could never describe it properly, she said ; but I gather that it was full of hills and valleys, with a very bright light over everything, and no trees or flowers as we understand and know them ; nor any rivers or lakes or water of any kind ; and yet it was very pleasant.

Mr. Brights and his young companion stopped before a cottage at last, and knocked at the door. They were told to enter ; and inside there sat an old woman peeling onions for her supper.

“ I can’t do with visitors,” she said, “ I’ve only enough for myself. I can’t give you any supper.”

“ Please wait till we ask for it,” said Mr. Brights sharply ; “ I don’t like onions.”

Flossie said she didn’t like them either ; and so the old woman was reassured, and let them sit down. The onions were so fine and large and strong, that the old woman wept tears of joy over them, and her two visitors also felt very much inclined to cry.

All at once a policeman pushed his head through a pane of glass in the window, and cried out—

“ Now then ! Come, none o’ that ! Don’t you know that peelin’ onions in a dwellin’ house is agin the law. Here’s all the folks in the street complainin’.”

"Well, what am I to do?" said the old woman.

"Give 'em to me," replied the policeman promptly; "I suppose I shall have to eat 'em for you." And he took them all away in a bag.

"That's a noble man," cried Mr. Brights, and gave him half-a-crown. "And now you'd better come with us," turning to the old woman; so they all three went on together.

They travelled up one street and down another, and then across some open country, and then through some more streets, until they came upon a goat leaning up against a lamp-post, with a telescope to his eye. He was so intent upon his observation of something or other, that he did not notice that his hat was all on one side through knocking against the lamp-post, and that some wicked thief had taken his watch and left only a piece of chain dangling.

"What's he doing?" whispered Flossie.

"Hi! what are you doing?" echoed Mr. Brights, in his loud voice.

No effect. The goat evidently didn't hear.

Then Mr. Brights impatiently gave him a great dig in the ribs, which seemed to knock the telescopist off his balance in more ways than one. He sank down "all of a heap" at the foot of the lamp-post, and his instrument shut up with a bang.

"There!" he cried, querulously, "now I've lost the focus, and I was getting the eclipse beautifully. The work of a life-time is destroyed in a moment. Too bad—too bad!" He fetched out a handkerchief and began to cry piteously.

Flossie was quite touched by his grief, but Mr. Brights remained unmoved, and treated the poor goat with great scorn; and the policeman who had taken the onions coming up at that moment, he gave the telescopist in charge.

"Ah, I see!" said the policeman; "been up to his larks again, has he?" And he carried him off to gaol.

"What a comfort it is," said Mr. Brights, sticking out his chest, "to have done one's duty!" He picked up the telescope as some reward for his services, and put it in his breast-pocket, out of which it stuck some couple of feet in an imposing manner.

The old woman who up till now had not spoken a word, now cried out that she was hungry; and the party accordingly turned into a confectioner's shop and sat down.

"Now," said Mr. Brights, grandly, "what will you have? I shall pay for everything."

Flossie, who had a weakness for gooseberry tart, said she would like some of that delicacy.

Mr. Brights stared.

"Never heard of it," he said. The man behind the counter, who, by the way, was as black as a sweep, had never heard of it either. The old woman had seized some extraordinary-looking confectionery from the counter, and was munching and crunching away at it in the corner; she paid no heed to anybody now.

"Never heard of it," said Mr. Brights again; "can't be good for much."

"Oh! yes it is," cried Flossie, "it's beautiful. If you were to taste it——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Brights. "Have some cinder pie—splendid." He seized one, and took a great mouthful as he spoke.

Ugh! what a crunch! Flossie left the two customers at their lunch, and rushed out of the shop. Ugh! Teeth! Horrors!!

She almost ran against a young man riding a donkey with his face to the tail.

He took off his hat very politely, and instead of putting it on again, turned half round and hung it on one of the donkey's ears, as though its head were a hat-stand.

"Now where do you want to go?" he asked; "I can take you; I'm a professional guide."

"I think," said Flossie, rather doubtfully, "I think I've seen about enough of this country. Which is the way out?"

The young man seemed very much amused at this question, and the donkey was amused, too; it laughed till the tears rolled down its cheeks and wagged its ears so that the hat fell off.

"Never mind it," said the young man, as Flossie was going to pick it up; "I've two better ones in my pocket, but I'm saving them up for my wedding. Now about 'the way out,' as you call it. There's what you call the chimney; *we* call it the grave-yard. Very full—very full; all my relatives are there; all soot, everyone of 'em. That's one way out. What do you think of it?"

"I'm afraid it's too black," said Flossie doubtfully; "and for another thing, it's—it's too high. And even if I ever got to the top, there's the roof, you know; and however should I get down?"

"Roof?" said the young man with a puzzled air; "I don't know in the least what you're talking about. But there's the other way—so there is—but you'll have to jump, you know; you won't mind that I suppose?"

Flossie said she would be only too happy to jump anywhere; and the young man pulled the donkey round by the tail, and they set off together.

"My name," said the young man, "is Cobbles—Tom Cobbles. I'm compelled to ride, as you see, ever since I had such a dreadful rheumatic attack last winter; but I won't go too fast for you."

"Excuse my asking," said Flossie, "but why do you ride the wrong way—with your face to the tail, I mean?"

"To avoid draughts," replied Mr. Cobbles, promptly, "and because I don't want to see what's coming. It saves worry. Life's a different thing when you only see things when they're gone by. Now I'm going to talk to you."

Mr. Cobbles then proceeded, according to Flossie's account to me, to relate his adventures at great length; but she could not have been paying much attention, for not one word could she remember afterwards, though, at my earnest entreaty, she tried very hard.

All at once the talk was brought to an end.

"Why!" cried Flossie, with a start, "here are the Christy Minstrels again!"

And there indeed they were, lying flat on their stomachs and kicking up their heels in the air just the same as before.

"Now," said Mr. Cobbles, "get ready for the jump."

"But I'm *not* ready," cried Flossie, desperately. "I—I don't know where I'm going to jump to!"

Mr. Cobbles paid no heed. "One—two—three—You're just on the top bar—off you go!"

But Flossie stood still in a great fright.

"What! aren't you gone?" cried Mr. Cobbles becoming wroth. (All the people in this country became warm on very small provocation.) "Here! Gee up! Neddy." And with that he backed the donkey at her at such a rate that if she had not jumped, she would have been knocked down.

She gave a great spring into—nothing as it seemed—a very dreadful experience, and then——

* * * * *

she found that her head had rolled off the hassock with a bang on to the floor; and here was old *Chardénal* still *fearing* or *being about to be feared*, etc., etc.; and here was the dining-room fire-place just opposite; and here was Thomas coming in to light the lamp; and, as I live, Flossie found she had only been asleep for ten minutes, by the clock on the mantelpiece.

Johnny's Carelessness, and what came of it.

BY CONSTANCE M. PREVOST.

CHAPTER I.

I WONDER why ever Mrs. Jones don't send in my bit of flour," said Mrs. Parsons to herself one Saturday afternoon, as she bustled about her cottage, putting everything in order for Sunday. "I'm sure I told Johnny to ask for it, and I can't think why they don't send it up. Why! How late it's getting!" she went on, glancing at the clock. "'Tis more than two hours since the boy went out. I'd go down myself and see after it, if it wasn't for the children. Here, Polly, you go and stand at the door, my dear, and see if Johnny or Mrs. Jones' little boy is coming along. And mind you tell me directly you see him, because you won't get any pudding to-morrow, you know, if the flour don't come in time."

Polly went at once to do as she was bid. She was a nice little girl of three years old, with round, pink cheeks, pretty

blue eyes, and yellow hair. She stood a long time at the door, waiting patiently, till at last her mother called out—

"Come back, Polly, it's no use to stay there any longer. I shan't have time to make the pudding now. There, don't cry," she went on, as tears of disappointment gathered in poor little Polly's eyes. "I daresay father 'll give you a few cherries to-morrow instead, because you've been a good girl, and trying to help mother. He'll be in directly and then you can ask him. Now, come along. Pick up baby's rattle, and then sit up to the table and have your tea. I wonder where Johnny has got to?"

Just at that minute the door opened, and Johnny came in, looking very hot, as if he had been running.

"Where have you been, all this time, Johnny?" asked his mother.

"Playing cricket, mother," said Johnny. "'Twas such fun; I got six runs."

"And where's the flour?"

"Flour?" said Johnny, opening his eyes very wide, and staring at his mother. "I say, mother! If I didn't forget all about it! But I'll go and get it this minute;" and he started up and put on his cap.

"It's too late, now," said his mother, "and you won't get the suet-pudding to-morrow. I've got plenty of tidying to do, let alone all the mending, and I shan't have no time this evening for making puddings. It'll serve you quite right, you naughty boy. You ought to have brought back the flour

directly instead of going playing cricket. I shan't trust you with another message for a long time."

"I'm very sorry, mother," said Johnny, "you see I was just going down to the shop, and Bill Meadows came along and told me to come to the field directly 'cause they wanted to begin playing; and I thought I'd just play one game and then go and fetch the flour, and then—I quite forgot all about it."

"Ah, Johnny!" said Mrs. Parsons, "that's always the way with you; you never do what you're told *at once*. You puts things off and then you forgets them. If you don't mind you'll get into great trouble some day. Now just you look at poor Polly, crying 'cause she won't get any Sunday pudding, all along of you."

Johnny threw down his cap, and ran to give his little sister a great hug, and, as their father just then came in, they all sat down to tea.

That evening Johnny thought a good deal about his carelessness, and made up his mind that the next time he was told to do anything, he would obey *at once*, without waiting to do anything else first.

CHAPTER II.

On Monday morning Mrs. Parsons said—

"Now, Johnny, I'm going to put Polly in your charge. Mind you bring her back home directly school is over. Don't

forget ; I don't want her to get about playing with the other children."

"All right, mother, I'll take care of her. Come, Polly ;" and taking his little sister's hand, Johnny started off towards the school.

Mrs. Parsons stood at the door a few minutes looking after them. A nice tidy little pair they were ; Johnny in his neat blue suit, and little Polly with her clean print frock and white pinafore.

"Well, I hope they won't get themselves in a mess," said the mother, as she went back into the house.

Meanwhile, the two children were getting on but slowly. Polly's socks would slip down inside her boots, and it took Johnny some time to pull them up again ; and then Polly had to stand still for some minutes while Johnny was trying to catch a beautiful red butterfly which was fluttering about the road. At last, however, they reached the school, and Polly was put with the other infants, while Johnny took his place among the boys.

When lessons were over, and the children were all trooping out of the school, one of the boys said to Johnny—

"I say, come and look at what I've got here."

"What is it, Ben ?" said Johnny, turning round.

Ben had got a small box in his hand and was peeping into it.

"Come down the lane," said he, "and I'll show it to you. I don't want to have all the fellows staring. Come along."

But Johnny stood still and looked round for his little sister. He remembered what his mother had told him, but then, he wanted *very* much to see what Ben had got in the box. He saw Polly playing "Round the ring" very happily with some other little girls.

"She's all right," he thought; "I'll only go for a minute. Mother wouldn't mind that;" and he ran down the lane with Ben.

When they were out of sight of the other boys Ben opened his box a little way and let Johnny peep in. Inside was a pretty little brown mouse with sharp frightened eyes. It had been caught in a trap, and Ben said he was going to tame it.

"You see I've bored some holes in the top of the box so as he can breathe, and if I could only make him eat I think he'd be all right."

"Won't he eat?" said Johnny. "Let's try! Have you got anything to give him?"

"Yes, I've got some bits of cheese in my pocket. Let's sit down on the bank and try."

And so the two boys sat down, and Johnny quite forgot about Polly while he coaxed and teased the poor little mouse, who was a great deal too frightened to do anything but try to hide in the corner of the box. At last Ben said—

"I say, Johnny, I'm getting hungry. Don't you think it's nearly dinner-time?"

Then Johnny remembered, and jumped up.

"I must go and see after Polly," he said, and he ran as

fast as he could up the lane. When he got to the school nearly all the children were gone, and he could not see Polly anywhere. He asked one of the elder girls if she had seen his little sister.

"Yes," she said, "I saw her going along towards home with the little Barnetts. I don't think your mother would like her to be with them. They're not nice children for her to play with. Perhaps, if you run, you'll catch them."

"Thank you," said Johnny, and he ran on as quickly as he could.

There were several children playing in the street, but he could see nothing of Polly, so he thought she must have gone on home.

He went more slowly then, for he was thinking that his mother would scold him when he got in, and he knew he deserved to be scolded.

"Perhaps she won't mind so much as Polly's got back all right by herself," he thought, as he came up to the door, and then he heard his mother's voice calling—

"Come, children! What a time you have been!"

He pushed open the door and went in. His father and mother were sitting at the table; the baby was in his cradle, but *Polly was not there.*

"Where's Polly?" asked Mrs. Parsons, quickly.

"Isn't she come back, mother?" asked Johnny, turning pale with fright.

"No," cried his mother, starting up; "where is she? Oh,

Johnny, you haven't gone and left her out in the street by herself?"

"I didn't mean to, mother," said Johnny, beginning to cry.

"Stop that," said his father, sternly. "Speak out, and tell your mother where you saw the child last."

"At the school," sobbed Johnny.

"Did you come away and leave her?"

"No; I only went to look at Ben Smith's mouse, and when I came back she was gone. Ellen Davis said she saw her along with the little Barnetts."

"Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Parsons; "that's just what I didn't want. Those children will teach her all their bad ways. I'll go and look for her this minute."

"No," said her husband, "don't you go, I will. Come with me, John;" and Johnny, still crying, followed his father out of the house.

As they walked quickly down towards the street, Johnny's father said—

"I'll tell you what, Johnny; I think you're a good-for-nothing boy to go and leave your little sister the very first time you were trusted to take care of her. If nothing worse comes of it, you'll have frightened your mother so as she won't like to trust you again, and I think it's quite disgraceful that a boy of your age shouldn't be able to make himself useful."

"Please, father, I forgot," said Johnny.

"Forgot! But you mustn't forget. If you did what

you're told at the right time, you wouldn't forget. I wonder what my master would say to me if I *forgot* to do my work—but, hullo! what's that?"

They had now reached the street, and saw, a few yards before them, a crowd gathered in the middle of the road. There was a cart waiting just beyond, and several people were hurrying up to see what was the matter.

"What is it?" asked Parsons quickly, as a man left the crowd, and walked past him up the street.

"A little girl run over by a cart. She ain't dead, but very near it."

The poor father covered his face with his hands for a moment.

"My little Polly!" he said, and then he strode in among the crowd, and Johnny could see him no more.

The boy stood still for a minute, too frightened to cry, and then as the people began to move, as if to make way for the poor child to be carried home, he turned round and ran quickly up the road towards the house. He heard some footsteps following him, and once he thought he heard someone call his name, but he could not look round. He was afraid to see poor Polly dying, or perhaps dead by this time.

When he got near the house he turned aside into a field, and threw himself down on the grass close to the hedge. Oh! how sorry he felt now that he had not *strictly* obeyed his mother. "Of course I oughtn't to have gone with Ben.

Mother said we was to come back directly school was over. Oh! I wish I had. Then Polly'd have been all right, and *now*"—and poor Johnny began to cry bitterly—"now she's killed, and it's my fault. Oh! Polly, Polly!"

"Yes, Johnny," said a little voice close to him.

He started up, and there, standing beside him, holding her father's hand, was Polly herself. Quite well, and not hurt at all; though her frock and pinafore, so clean and fresh that morning, were now all draggled and splashed with mud.

"Why, Polly!" cried Johnny, staring first at her and then at his father. "Isn't she hurt, father?"

"No," said his father, taking Polly up in his arms as he spoke; "it wasn't our little girl that the cart went over, thank God. But she was close by all the time. It was one of the little Barnetts that was knocked down, and got her arm broken, and you know Polly was playing with them. But she won't play out in the street again, 'cause she knows mother doesn't like it—will she, Polly?"

"No, daddy;" said Polly.

"That's what my little girl's got to remember; and Johnny, what lesson have you learnt to-day?"

"To do what I'm told without waiting to do anything else first," said Johnny.

"That's it, my boy," said his father. "And now let's go back to mother. Run on Polly, and get your pinafore changed for dinner."

When the little girl was gone, Parsons pulled his boy close to him, and said—

“ Don't forget, Johnny, to thank God when you say your prayers to-night. If it hadn't been for His mercy our little Polly might have been killed by that cart.”

Johnny could not answer, but his father saw that he understood.

CHAPTER III.

After this, Johnny was very careful never to put off doing anything that he was told to do, and as he tried hard and did not forget to ask God to help him, he soon improved so much that his mother often said that he was becoming quite a trustworthy boy. However, as people cannot become quite good all at once, so Johnny sometimes forgot his good resolutions and fell back into his old way of thinking when he was told to do anything. “ I'll only just finish this game first,” or “ I'll go in one minute, when Joe's finished his story ;” and this putting off of his duty generally ended in his forgetting it and not doing it at all.

One day, when he was coming back from afternoon school, he met Mr. Fanshawe, the clergyman.

“ Ah, Johnny,” said he, as Johnny stopped to make his best bow ; “ I was just looking for one of you boys to ask you to take a note to Bonchester for me. I want it to go at once. Can you take it ? ”

"Oh yes, sir," said Johnny; glad to be of use.

"I want you to take it to Mr. Fenton, in the High Street, and you need not wait for an answer. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I'll go at once."

"Thank you, my boy. Here is the note then, and here are two small wheels to help you to run along quickly;" and the clergyman put two pennies into the boy's hand.

"Oh! thank you, sir," said Johnny, making his bow again, and looking very much pleased.

Mr. Fanshawe then walked away and Johnny slipped the note into his pocket and went on up the street. "I say! Won't I get a stunning lot of marbles with those pennies!" he said to himself. Let's see; how many shall I get? Ben's got more than twenty. I should like to have a good lot.

As he said this he saw he was just passing the shop where he knew he could buy the marbles. "It won't take a minute just to go in and get them," he thought; and, without stopping to remember what Mr. Fanshawe had said, he went into the shop. It took him some time to choose the marbles, but at last they were got and paid for, and as Johnny came out of the shop he said to himself—"There! Now I'll go straight to Bonchester." But just then several of the other boys were passing the shop, and Johnny could not help calling out to them—

"I say! what have I got here?" as he held up the bag of marbles.

"Oh! what a jolly lot!" cried the other boys. "Come on, Jack! Let's have a game."

"I can't stay," said Johnny; "I'm on a message."

"Oh, you can just stop for one game. It won't take long. Come on!"

And Johnny said to himself—"I'll only stay a minute. Mr. Fanshawe wouldn't mind that."

CHAPTER IV.

The next day there was a great excitement among the children. They heard that the School Feast, which they had been looking forward to for a long time, was to take place the very next day.

"We are all to be at church by half-past one," said Ellen Davis; "and after service go back straight to the Vicarage, and what do you think I heard? Why, as the garden at the Vicarage isn't large enough for us all to play in, and the field is put up for hay, Mr. Fanshawe is going to take us all to Watercombe. You know that's close to the sea, and we shall be able to have our tea on the sands. Isn't that kind of Mr. Fanshawe?"

"Are we going to the sea? Oh! Hurrah, hurrah!" cried the boys, and Johnny was one of the loudest. The girls were just as much pleased, only they showed it more quietly, and they all felt very grateful to Mr. and Mrs.

Fanshawe for having thought of such a nice treat for them. As for Johnny, he was almost out of his wits for joy. He had never seen the sea, but he had often heard of it and wanted very much to see it. He was so excited at the thought of going that he could hardly keep still a moment. All dinner time he was chattering away to his father and mother and Polly about Watercombe, and all he expected to see and do there. He hoped the sea would be very rough, with great, big waves tossing about, as he heard they did sometimes.

"I don't suppose it'll be like that to-morrow," said his father. "It's the high winds, you know, as makes it rough, and there don't seem no chance of that now."

"Oh, I wish it would," said Johnny. "Wouldn't I like to go and stand close up, and let the big waves come and splash up against me!"

"You wouldn't stand there long," said his father. "The waves would throw you down in no time, and you'd be dragged out, and drowned most like."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Parsons, "I do hope you won't go and get too close, Johnny."

"Never fear, mother," said Parsons. "If this weather lasts (and I hope it will, because we're late with the hay) the sea 'll be as smooth as a pond to-morrow. And I hope, Johnny, as you'll try and behave nicely, and not give trouble to the ladies and gentlemen."

"Yes, I do hope you will Johnny" said his mother. "I'm

sure I think it's so very kind of Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe and the young ladies to take so much trouble for you children. Mind you don't forget to say 'Thank you, sir,' when you come away."

The next morning Johnny could hardly eat any breakfast, he was so excited at the thought of the day's pleasure. The weather was lovely, and Parsons said, as he set off to his work—

"We shan't have no rain to-day, Johnny. I fancy you'll have a nice time of it."

"Oh, yes, father," said Johnny. "Won't I have lots to tell when I gets back"

There was no school that morning, and Johnny found the time go very slowly. He was dressed in his best suit, and ready to start by twelve o'clock, and then he had still to wait an hour, for his mother would not allow him to set off before one. Polly was not to go, for Mrs. Parsons thought she was too young to go so far without some one older than Johnny to take charge of her. So Johnny promised to bring back some shells for her, and this made the little girl almost as happy as if she, too, were going to Watercombe.

At last the time came, and Johnny said good-bye to his mother, and Polly, and the baby, and then set off towards the church. He soon came to the street, which was full of children, dressed in their best clothes, and looking very happy as they walked quietly towards the church.

"I say," said Johnny to Ben Smith, "how are we going

to get over to Watercombe. It's more than ten miles, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Ben. "P'raps we're going in the carrier's van, like the Choir did last year."

"Oh, I say! What fun that would be! But we couldn't all get into the van."

"Well, I don't know," said Ben. "Come on, or we shall get left behind," and he set off at a run.

The service was not long. There were some prayers and one hymn. It was one that the children were all very fond of, beginning, "I love to hear the story." After that Mr. Fanshawe made a short address to them, and then they all came out of church, and the schoolmaster formed them into a long procession, to walk up to the Vicarage. Johnny could hardly help jumping and skipping about for joy when he thought of the nice treat that was in store for them. At length they were all collected on the small lawn in front of the Vicarage, and then Mr. Fanshawe, who had walked on first, came out of the house, and, after speaking kindly to them, took out his watch and looked anxiously down the road.

"I can't make it out," he said to Mrs. Fanshawe, who had followed him out of the house; "I am sure I told Fenton that I wished them to be here at half-past one, so that we should have plenty of time to pack everything in, and now it is five minutes past two."

"I suppose they have been delayed by something," said

Mrs. Fanshawe. "I should think they will be here in a few minutes. Meanwhile," she went on, turning to the school-master, "it will be a good opportunity for the children to sing us the new songs which they have been learning."

So the children sang the songs as well as they possibly could, and Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe and the young ladies listened, and said they were very pretty, and very well and carefully sung. Then Mr. Fanshawe looked at his watch again, and said—

"It is now twenty minutes past two. I cannot think why the brakes do not come. I told Fenton to be sure to let me know if he could not send them, and I have heard nothing from him."

"When did you send the note?" asked Mrs. Fanshawe.

"On Tuesday; I sent it by one of the boys, so that Fenton could answer by the same day's post, if he could not send them. Which of you was it," said Mr. Fanshawe, turning round to the boys, "who took a note for me to Bonchester, on Tuesday?"

"Not me, sir;" "Not me, sir," said the boys one after the other; but at last Johnny Parsons stood forward and said—

"Please, sir," and then stopped. His face was very red, and his eyes full of tears.

"Well, Johnny, was it you?" said Mr. Fanshawe kindly.

"Please, sir," said Johnny, "I—I——"

"Well, what? Don't be frightened. Was it you that I gave the note to?"

"Yes, sir, and—and please, sir, I—forgot to take it," and Johnny covered his face with his hands and began to sob.

"Forgot to take it!" exclaimed Mr. Fanshawe. "Do you mean that Mr. Fenton has not received the note at all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it then?"

"Please, sir, I s'pose it's in my pocket at home," said Johnny, crying so much that Mr. Fanshawe could hardly hear what he said.

"How very unfortunate; I am afraid, then, that we must give up the idea of going to Watercombe to-day. There is no time to send for the brakes now. Do you know, Johnny, that that note, which I trusted you with, was the order for three large brakes to come here to-day, and take you all to Watercombe? Your carelessness and disobedience has lost all the others the treat."

Johnny cried more than ever, and his sobs were echoed by some of the younger children,* who could not help crying with disappointment, when they understood that they would not be able to go to the sea. The elder boys and girls were very much disappointed too, and some of the boys got round Johnny, and scolded him well for his carelessness.

Just then, as they were all standing waiting while Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe and the schoolmaster were talking over what could be done, the garden gate slammed, and a gentleman came up the path towards the house. Some of the children turned round, and saw that it was Sir Henry Leslie,

the gentleman who lived in the big house in the park.

"Why, hullo!" said he, "what is going on here? Are you having a match to see who can cry the loudest?"

"Sir Henry!" exclaimed Mr. Fanshawe. "When did you come home? I thought you were in London?"

"So I was till yesterday morning, when I found it so hot, I thought I would run down and see how things were getting on here. I can't say you all look very cheerful. What's the matter?"

Mr. Fanshawe told him the whole story, not mentioning, however, the name of the boy whose carelessness had done the mischief.

"So that's it, is it!" said Sir Henry, when the story was finished, and then, turning to the children, he went on, "I won't ask who it was who has spoilt all the others' pleasure, but I will just say this, 'It will be a good lesson to him and to you all from this day forward to be very careful always to do faithfully and *at once* any messages which may be entrusted to you. A message is an important thing, often very much more important than the messenger thinks; but whether it be important or not, when a boy has undertaken it, it is his duty to do it, and if he doesn't do it he fails in his duty, and that is a thing which boys and girls must never do if they wish to grow up good, trustworthy men and women. And now, if you will all remember that, we will try and forget all the rest, and see if we can't spend a happy afternoon, though we can't go to Watercombe. Mr.

Fanshawe, do you think they could all walk as far as the Park? We can soon put up half-a-dozen swings, and there are two boats on the lake, which, though it isn't the sea, is something like it; and if Mrs. Fanshawe will be so kind as to have the tea-things and the cake ready, I will send a cart down at once for them. What do you think of the plan?"

"That it is a very kind one, and I thank you most heartily, Sir Henry," said Mr. Fanshawe, gratefully; and then he turned to the children, and explained to them the kind gentleman's plan.

As soon as the children understood that they were really to go and spend the afternoon in the beautiful Park, and perhaps go in the boats on the water, they scarcely knew what to do for a moment, they were so pleased. Then the schoolmaster said—

"Three cheers for Sir Henry!" and they all shouted as loud as they could to show their gratitude for the kindness.

Sir Henry called out, "Thank you," as he went down to the gate, where he mounted his horse, and rode on quickly to the house to give orders.

The children were not long in following him. Mr. Fanshawe stayed behind a few minutes to see about getting the things ready to be taken to the Park, and when he presently came down the path to the gate he heard just outside a sound of someone sobbing and crying bitterly. Looking round, he saw Johnny Parsons leaning against the wall with his face hidden.

"Why, Johnny! how is this? Why are you not gone with the others?"

"Please, sir," said Johnny, looking up, "Sir Henry wouldn't like me to come."

"He did not say you were not to," said Mr. Fanshawe.

"No, sir, but I don't deserve it," said Johnny with a sob.

"Please, sir, will you forgive me for forgetting the letter?"

"I certainly forgive you, Johnny, and if it were *only* forgetting I should think very little of it; but are you sure it was only forgetfulness? Did you set off to Bonchester directly I gave you the note, as I desired you?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"Please, sir, I went to buy some marbles with the money you gave me; I wish I hadn't."

"It is too late to wish that now," said Mr. Fanshawe.

"You see, Johnny, it all came of your not obeying *at once*. I think I have heard you complained of before in that respect. You must try and cure yourself of such a bad habit. I hope what has happened to-day will be (as Sir Henry said) a lesson to you. And now you had better come with me to the Park."

But Johnny still hung back, saying—

"Please sir, the other boys won't like to play with me."

"Never mind. I do not suppose they will remember your carelessness, but if they do, you must take it as part of your punishment, and try to bear it bravely. I feel sure that if

you take what they say in good part, they will soon leave off teasing you. Now we must be off. Here is Mrs. Fanshawe coming down the path, and I think you can make yourself useful by carrying her basket for her."

Johnny was very glad to do this, for he was always pleased to be of use. They soon arrived at the Park, where they found all the children assembled under the large trees, and only waiting for the young ladies to come to begin some games. The girls were soon scattered over the grass, playing very happily at all kinds of delightful games. And then Sir Henry came out and shewed the boys where to put their wickets, and even was so kind as to play with them for a short time. The children said afterwards that they had never had such a nice treat. Sir Henry and Mr. Fanshawe made them run races, and gave prizes to the winners. The elder boys and girls were allowed to go in the boats on the lake. And when they were all sitting on the grass, having their tea and cake, Sir Henry made his gardener bring out a large basket of fruit, enough for each child to have some.

After tea came more games, scrambles for sugar plums, and swinging, which lasted till the schoolmaster called the children together, to sing some of their best songs to Sir Henry. And then, with hearty cheers, the happy evening came to a close.

Johnny walked home very quietly, thinking over all that had happened during the day. He had enjoyed the afternoon very much, for though some of the boys had at first

begun to tease him, they soon stopped when they found that he did not get angry, but was really sorry for what he had done. He had got on well at cricket, and had won a prize in one of the races, which he was going to give to Polly, to make up to her for not having any shells from Watercombe. But in spite of all this pleasure, he felt very grave when he thought of that half-hour in the Vicarage garden. He was a kind-hearted little fellow, and the remembrance of how the little children had cried with disappointment, and how grave and sad the elder ones had looked, made the tears come once more into his eyes. "All my fault!" And then he began to think over what Sir Henry had said—"You must not fail in your duty if you wish to grow up good and trustworthy men and women."

"I *will* try," said Johnny, and as he looked up to the sky where the stars were just beginning to glimmer, he remembered Whose help he must ask in order to be able to keep his resolution.

Natalie's Neighbour.

BY MABEL E. WOTTON,

AUTHOR OF "A NURSERY IDYLL," ETC.

NATALIE was enjoying herself royally. There was no one to play with, no one to talk to, nothing to do. But then, when one is a small girl, and is kept always and always in a nursery at the top of a big London house, there is something very grand and grown-up in being allowed to wander about the other rooms as much as one likes, and even be able to stand on the balcony, as Natalie stood now, and look at the carriages and the pretty people in them who drove through the Square.

This blissful state of things had been brought about by Marie, the French nurse, falling ill and having to go away for a rest, at the very time when Miss Cox, the governess, was having a month's holiday, for there was no one else to take care of Natalie except Mary Anne, the under-housemaid. And whenever Natalie asked Mary Anne anything, she always said, "Yes, Missy dear," which shows that she did not interfere very much.

Besides this maid, whom the child knew very well, because

it was always she who carried up the meals to the nursery, there were a great many more happy people who were grown-up enough to live downstairs, for there were crowds of servants, and generally two or three guests, and, of course, Papa and Mother.

Mother was the prettiest little mother in all the world, and twice every day she used to climb all the way up to the nursery, and tell Natalie how sorry she was she couldn't stay more than five minutes, and how happy she would be when her darling little daughter was old enough to go out to dances with her.

"But I can dance, Mother! Look!" Natalie would say sometimes, and holding out her holland pinafore between little pink fingers and thumbs, she would spin round and make the loveliest "cheeses" possible. But Mother always said that grown-up dancing was something quite different, and that Natalie must wait until she was taller, and then she would see for herself.

And then they kissed each other, and Mother went away, and the little girl tried to stretch herself by swinging on to the top bar of her brass cot, so that she might grow tall soon, and go out to dances too.

Papa was different. He never came to the nursery, for he was a Sunday papa. He was a very grand gentleman indeed, and sometimes—for Natalie saw him as she hung over the top of the banisters—sometimes he put on a lot of white curls and a red dress, and pretended to be somebody else.

She knew he did something for the laws, and rather thought that he had probably helped to make King John sign Magna Charta, because he seemed so very, very old. But she was shy about asking him this on Sunday afternoons, and she did not think anyone else would know.

So nobody, you see, counted very much in Natalie's life except Marie and Miss Cox, but lately there had been the neighbour too, and it was of him she was thinking as she stood there on the balcony in the June sunshine.

To think about a thing, and to do it, was very much the same with her, so two minutes after it had first flashed into her head that Mary Anne had told her "the pore young gentleman had broke his leg," and had thereby increased her intense anxiety to see him, Natalie was climbing over the iron railing which cut off her mother's balcony from the balcony next door. She managed it safely, trotted along the next few steps, and turned in at the first open window she came to. So far so good, but the room was darkened by sun-blinds, and there was a little step which led from the stones to the boards, and which the young explorer did not see, so there was a muffled cry and a stumbling fall, and Natalie lay a small crumpled heap of pink cambric on the polished floor, with her mane of fair hair completely hiding her face.

Something on the sofa at the other end of the room—it looked principally gloomy eyes, a frown, and clouds of tobacco smoke—moved at the sound, and a voice cried

sharply, "What is that?" Receiving no answer, the something reared itself on to one elbow to find out for itself, and Natalie heard an astonished "What the dickens!" And then, "Get up, can't you? Who are you?"

This little maid scrambled to her feet at this, and advanced timidly into the room. She was very seldom shy, but even she could not help feeling that she had hardly started her visit in a dignified manner. She was sure that when Mother paid calls she never tumbled flat on the floor.

"I am Natalie Despard," she began falteringly, "and I am your neighbour."

He seemed to be making it all the harder for her by staring in silent amazement, evidently not understanding one whit, although she thought she had explained already.

"I am eight years old, and I have just gone into stockings, *and* the Catechism," she said next. "My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself, and—I knew you'd brokek yourself, and—so I came."

She stopped, and bending to draw back her skirts tightly against her knees, she glanced appealingly from the dumb testimony of the shapely little silk-clad legs to her listener's face.

"*And* the Catechism," she said again, with much emphasis.

The young man's face cleared as if by magic. He put down his pipe, and burst into a hearty laugh.

"You queer little mortal! Come over here, nearer to me," he said. "That's right! So you are the child from next door, are you? And you came in to see me because you

thought I might be dull? Now that was uncommonly good of you, I am sure. Where have you seen me?"

"From the Square gardens. Miss Cox won't let me play with the other little boys and girls, you know, because perhaps they are not good enough to know me, she says——"

The exclamation her companion gave sounded like "Good Heavens!" but when Natalie, after a pause, gravely asked, "Shall I stop? Are you saying your prayers?" he told her he had not said anything. It must have been the tobacco smoke which had made him cough. So she went on—

"But you are different, 'cause I've seen you often coming out of the house when I was standing near the railings, an' you always look nice. An', anyhow, the Prayer-book says I must love you 'cause you are my neighbour. What is your name?"

"Cobham," said the young man.

"Cobham Something, or Something Cobham?"

"Dick," said the other, laconically.

He was not like Natalie, who talked to herself and to her dolls, to the sunshine and the wind, to anything and nothing, rather than hold her tongue. Mr. Cobham never said two words where one would do.

The little girl glanced round the room, and selecting that particular one of the ugly heavy chairs which looked to her a trifle less heavy than the rest, she dragged it up to the sofa, and seated herself on it, with her feet dangling many inches from the floor.

"Marie would have asked a visitor to sit down," she said gently, and then demanded, "What were you doing when I came in?"

Cobham changed his mind as to what he had been going to say, and answered instead that he had been growling.

"Why?" Natalie was deeply interested. "Growling—that is miserying, isn't it? I thought you must be so happy. You go for walks by yourself, and no one says 'No' to you, an' you sit up after seven, an' you do as you like all the time."

"Oh, do I though!" broke in the other. "Much you know about it then. I am bullied and ragged at from morning to night; I am never given a moment's peace. And all to gratify the spite of the most pig-headed old idiot in existence! Why aren't we consulted about our grandfathers, that's what I want to know? I should have taken precious good care not to have chosen Mr. Richard Cobham, senior, for mine, I can tell you."

He jerked out these remarks as savagely as possible, and pitched away the cushion from the sofa head to the other end of the room, but Natalie only slid a confiding little hand into his, and said consolingly, "It is horrid for you if he's cross. What's he cross for, Dick?"

Then Dick, thus affectionately addressed, hesitated a moment before telling her, for she was such a mite of a child, but then he was only a boy himself, though so big a one that Natalie thought him a man, and it was a relief to have someone to talk to. So it all came out, how he had

always longed to be a soldier like his dead father, but how his grandfather, with whom he lived in this ugly barrack-like house, had determined to make him a merchant like himself, and how it was only after fearful "shindies" that he had gained permission to go to a crammer's, he meant a tutor's, to be prepared for Woolwich.

"Well?" Natalie was well-nigh breathless. "An' you are learning your lessons hard, an' he is being very proud of you, an' you've breaked your leg in saving somebody's life!"

The little maid almost tumbled off her chair in her excitement, but Cobham only looked cross.

"A lot of the fellows were larking about, and I broke it at leap-frog," he explained. "And that was the last straw to grandfather. He said that if that was my way of working for the army, I might whistle for another chance, for all he cared."

Natalie nodded to show she understood him, and sat silently thinking it out, while Cobham picked up his pipe and re-lighted it, feeling almost ashamed of having talked so much to such a small child. Yet what a pretty little thing she was, sitting perched there corner-wise on the chair, with her short legs straddling, and her dimpled hands clinging to the patch of rubbed leather which was visible between her knees. She looked so solemn, and so full of big schemes, that he was almost disappointed when she finally slid off her chair, observing that she must go back to Mary Anne.

"But I am going to thought about you," she added

mysteriously, as she put up her face to kiss him good-bye. Natalie's verbs were apt to be a trifle odd when she was greatly in earnest. "I will come and see you to-morrow, dear Dick, and then I will tell you."

With this promise she departed, climbed over the railing again, to the dismay of a passing postman, who thought she would lose her balance, and trotted up contently to her nursery and to the brindled puss, who was fast asleep on the top of the doll's house.

His mistress woke him, and scrambling into the window seat, which was too high up to show her the Square gardens, but which commanded a fine view of fifty-three chimney-pots, she began to cudgel her small wits as to what she could do to help her neighbour.

"My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do unto Cobham as I would that Cobham would do unto me," she remarked to the brindled puss, who was lying curled up in her lap, and the brindled puss purred gently. "But that is that he would take me to the monkey-house at the Zoo, an' I can't take him there, 'cause of his leg. He wants most to be helped with his lessons, but I s'pose I am too little to help."

The puss shook his head. I think myself that he did it because Natalie was tickling his ears, but she thought he meant she wasn't a bit too little to help her neighbour if she tried, and perhaps she was right.

Well, they puzzled it out between them, Natalie and the

brindled puss, and next day, when Mother had driven away in the carriage as usual, and Mary Anne had asked her if she would mind being left by herself for an hour, as a particular friend of her own had come up from the country to see her, the little girl went along the balcony again, and paid a second visit to her neighbour.

Then she unfolded her grand plan, which was that he should "go on doing lessons" all the same, and that she should "play pretend" she was Mr. Matthews, the tutor. He had all his books at home, hadn't he?

Cobham stared. Oh, yes, he had the books. Then laughed. "The idea of a baby like you!"

"I am eight," said Natalie, with dignity. "Where are they?"

"There."

The invalid jerked his head in the direction of a case full of volumes of some sort which was standing behind his couch. The drawing-room was never entered by his grandfather, and had been given up completely to the young gentleman and his belongings.

Natalie walked up to the case forthwith, and tugged at the biggest book she could see, glancing over her shoulder to enquire of her friend, "Is this one? I am going to get them, you know."

"Yes."

"And the next?"

"Yes. Oh, all that row. What is the good of bothering me?"

The little maid pulled them out one by one, and after many journeys to and fro, and an endless string of questions, succeeded in getting them all neatly arranged in little heaps upon the floor in front of him.

"Now begin!" she said, and pulling forward a chair to yesterday's place, she climbed up on to it, and eyed him as soberly as a young judge.

Cobham was not quite sure whether to be vexed or to laugh at her, and at last picked up one of the books and began idly turning over the leaves.

"It would be an awful grind," he grumbled, "and I don't believe for a moment I could get through."

"Through what?"

"The exam., of course," said Cobham impatiently. "I know I can't what you call 'learn my lessons' without anyone to help me."

"Oh!" Natalie drew up her feet until they rested on the seat of the chair, and then she clasped her arms round her legs, balancing her little rounded chin on her knees. Then she answered him very slowly and sorrowfully—

"I didn't know you were a coward!" she said.

Cobham's history fell to the ground with a crash. He almost roared at her, "WHAT?"

"If you were a soldier you wouldn't want anyone to help you how to fight," retorted Natalie, nothing daunted. "This is the littler part of being a soldier, an' you are a coward to want helping."

At first, Cobham looked as if he would have strangled her, but presently he cooled down, and picked up his book, she sitting watching him. It was no use explaining to a senseless illogical baby like that! It wasn't even much use to fume and rage about it! But, at all events, until she went, he would keep his eyes glued to the pages in front of him, and that would help to put such idiotic notions out of her head.

This he proceeded to do, and not being stupid by nature, he found himself becoming gradually interested, and when she went away after a repetition of yesterday's kiss, he went on reading to amuse himself. After all, it was less dull than endless smoke and French novels; though, of course, it would not be the faintest use in any other way.

During the night—his nights were often sleepless ones, and he was rather grateful to have something fresh to think about—he came to the conclusion that after all it might be worth while to have a try for it. If he failed, no one would know but Natalie; and if he pulled through after all, why it would be just heavenly! And besides, dropping from the heroics to common-place boyish defiance, it would be worth something to prove to his little friend that he had some grit in him after all. So when she next made her appearance, which was three days later, and demanded to know what he had been doing, he was able to give an excellent account of so many hours of solid reading.

This went on for about three weeks, and at the end of that time Cobham had another conversational outbreak, and

confided to her that he really thought he might stand some sort of a chance.

"If only grandfather would have in some of the fellows I could tell better how I stood," he added. "He never will have anyone here, and it has been precious dull all this time, seeing no one but himself occasionally, and the doctor, and the man with meals and things."

"There's me," suggested Natalie.

"Oh, you're a regular little brick!" Really, Cobham had grown most friendly. "I shall be awfully sorry when your Miss Cox comes back, and I see no more of you. But—Gracious!"

He broke off suddenly, for the large heavy window, which was left open for the greater part of these summer days, and of which Natalie had made a front door, fell down and shut itself up with a *bang*!

"Phew!" whistled Cobham. "Now the sash line is gone. How are you going home, Natalie? You will have to live with me for ever and ever."

"How could I?" asked the child, and so blankly that he instantly set himself to console her.

"Never mind. You will have to go downstairs, and let yourself out by the front door."

"S'pose I can't turn the handle."

"Then you must go to the top of the kitchen stairs, and shout. There is only the old man and his wife there. I only hope you won't give them fits."

"I have no fits to give them," Natalie assured him, under the belief that fits must be a kind of sweetmeat, "but I will call them. Good-bye, Dick. An' you'll let me dress up in your red coat sometimes when you're a soldier, won't you, please?"

Made happy on this point, she started on her voyage of discovery, and was exactly half-way down the stairs when she saw an elderly man coming up them. Natalie was surprised, but she wasn't half so surprised as the man was, for it was Mr. Cobham himself, though Natalie thought it was the servant. And, of course, it was rather a shock to him to find a strange little girl wandering about his house without any coat or hat on, for she seemed quite at her ease, and said at once, "Oh, there you are; Mr. Dick says you are to let me out."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Cobham. He took his gold-rimmed glasses out of his pocket and put them on, the better to look at her. "What an extraordinary child!"

"An' I wanted to tell you," pursued Natalie, "that Mr. Dick says it is so 'precious dull' without anybody that I am going to try and send someone. I think Lord Loftus would come—he is my cousin, you know. But you must let him in at the front door, 'cause I don't think he would like to come along the balcony like I do."

"Do *you* come along the balcony?" Mr. Cobham was beginning to understand.

"I come to see Dick. He is my neighbour, you see. I

come almost every day to help him with his lessons."

"*You* do? What lessons, for pity's sake?"

He must certainly be a very stupid old man, Natalie decided, but she was anxious that he should quite understand about Dick, and how important it was that he should have a clever person, "cleverer nor me," explained Natalie, to tell him if he were going on all right. So she was very particular to make him understand what a pity it was that his grandfather should be so cross, when her dear Dick was determined to be a soldier, and was trying very hard all by himself. And it wasn't fair, for papa said you generally got what you deserved in this world, and her Dick did deserve to be a soldier, because he was so brave.

"An' you will let in Loftus or someone, won't you, please?" Natalie ended, coaxingly. "I've no yellow shillings, but Loftus will give you one, like he does Perkins at home when he stays with us. You will, won't you? Don't you hear me?"

The man seemed to be like Cobham, for he looked as if he were thinking of much more than he said, but he answered, "Yes, I will let them in," and Natalie went away quite contented.

That year Natalie had two letters, the first two she had ever had. The first came the day after that talk on the stairs, and it told her that without any explanation from his grandfather, a tutor had suddenly been engaged to work

with Dick at home. "I write this in case you can't come in for a day or two, and I know you'll want to know," was the finish of this letter, which was read to Natalie by the much amazed Mary Anne.

The next came a long time afterwards, dated from Woolwich, and it was all printed in big letters so that Natalie could read it for herself.

"I am here," wrote Dick, "and jollier than I have ever been in my life. Three cheers for us both ! for I know now that I should never have got the tutor if it hadn't been for working up alone, and I should never have done that if it hadn't been for you. So three cheers for us ! Give the brindled puss my love, and tell him what I say."

So Natalie gave the brindled puss his love, and explained the letter to him.

"What Dick really means is 'three cheers for the Catechism,'" she said.

The Goats' Half-holiday.

A NORWEGIAN STORY.

BY FANNY BARRY,

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CHAPTER I.

THEY were a family of four young Goats, living with their parents on one of the most retired mountain-tops of Norway.

The house was small. It was built of stone, and from the outside was hardly distinguishable from the rocks around it; but inside, the three rooms were homely and comfortable.

The front kitchen was furnished simply as all Norwegian cottages, with pitch-pine stools and table, a huge stove, and shelves decorated with pottery and copper stewpans.

On the coldest winter day this room was always warm and cheerful, and though there was an elegant sitting-room leading out of it, with a huge best-bed and a couple of carved arm-chairs, the family always preferred the kitchen, and never went into the other except on high feast days, when the Goat-mother attired herself in her black dress and

mitten, and the Goat-father sat down in a long broad-cloth coat which had belonged to his grandfather.

It was certainly old-fashioned in cut, but as the Goat-mother often said, "If you only wait long enough the fashion will be sure to come round again; whereas if I were to cut the tails off, I am convinced we should hear the next day that they were going to be worn touching the ground in Christiania—therefore it is wiser to be on the safe side."

As to the Goat-father, he was a simple honest farmer, and did not trouble his head about fashion. "Attend school, and never worry your parents," were his two invariable injunctions to his children; and though his two elder sons, Jacob and Holbaek, were occasionally very tiresome, Gustave and Gunni, the younger Goats, never gave their mother a moment's anxiety.

The Gunnson family had been established on the pine-covered mountain for generations.

The district was so pleasantly secluded that in winter-time they had the whole mountain entirely to themselves, and when they wished to descend to the valley, they could do so in a few minutes by darting down any of the snow-covered clearings on an iron-shod sledge made of pine wood.

Then there were the snow-shoes on which the young Goats went to school every morning, for in Norway they are very particular about education.

An aged Reindeer presided over the school, and his learning was reported to be so enormous, that Goats were

sometimes sent up from the valleys to board out with Goat families of the neighbourhood, in order to have the benefit of the course of instruction.

One of the Reindeer's old-fashioned peculiarities was that he "set" all the copies with his horns, dipping them into the ink-pot, and forming the letters laboriously by movements of the head.

He said that it had been the custom in his youth, and he did not hold with new-fangled notions.

He was often giddy on writing days, and had to be fanned by the scholars, and assisted back to his high chair on the platform; but after a glass of water he would begin all over again.

The Gunnsons were some of the Reindeer's oldest friends, and therefore he took a special interest in the studies of the children.

The two elder Goats often wished he did not, for his sharp, bright eyes, through their large spectacles, seemed to see their smallest indiscretions. His green smoking-cap with the yellow tassel would nod angrily, and his rod strike the table, while he shouted—

"Attention, if you please, Goats, Bears, and Reindeer! or fifty lines of the Stannan-Saga by heart before bed-time!"

The school-room was at the end of a chain of subterranean caverns, stretching from a secluded valley through many windings, but the old Reindeer had had the floor of the

passages carefully levelled, and small oil lamps were suspended at intervals to light the way.

These were always trimmed by the Reindeer himself, who found it quite a distraction from his heavier duties.

On one occasion he had been known to fill them with ink instead of oil, and never discovered his mistake, until some of the scholars commencing their exercises, an explosion of suppressed laughter reached his ears; and when he rapped violently on his desk and asked the reason, Jacob informed him, with a smile of delight, they had just discovered the ink-bottles contained nothing but lamp-oil!

"Dear, dear!" said the Reindeer angrily, to cover his natural confusion. "This all comes of sending my best spectacles to be mended!"

CHAPTER II.

"I am very thankful, my dear children," said the Goat-mother as she brushed the young Goats' hair one snowy morning early in December, "that you have behaved well enough to please the Reindeer. I know how particular he is, for both your father and I were at school with him. He would never have given you this merit half-holiday if he had not been satisfied with you."

She tied on their fur caps, took out the snow-shoes from the shed, gave them each a satchel with black bread and some salt fish and embraced them affectionately.

"I shall not expect you home till late, and you have my permission to visit the Pig-village, but mind you do not get into any mischief. Give my message to the Pig-mother and ask her to be sure and come to me for a day's weaving. You may have coffee with her, for she is a person I can trust, but do not play with the other Pigs, they are not creatures I wish you to associate with."

The Goats promised eagerly. It was a great treat to be allowed to go alone for an expedition, and they were very fond of the Pig-mother, who went out by the day to different families to do their weaving. She always had excellent coffee in her little house, and if she knew they were coming—as on the present occasion—there were always fresh-baked cakes and cranberry jam with salt on it.

The path to the school entrance was known only to the Goats of the neighbourhood; and the Gunnsons, after winding amongst great rocks in the green gloom of the pine trees, came out on to a clearing high up on the mountain. Before them stretched a long expanse of the whitest snow unbroken by a single obstacle. It sloped gradually down to a valley where a flat road of snow led right up to the home of the Reindeer.

Jacob and Holbaek fastened on their snow-shoes, and then assisted the two younger Goats to do the same; and the whole party, with their long sticks in their hands, flew down the steep incline with shouts of joy.

Their impetus was so great that they glided along the flat

snow without being able to stop themselves, and, not seeing a figure which was advancing towards them, they cannonaded against it, and all fell in a struggling mass on the ground together.

When they recovered themselves, they found that the traveller they had stopped in this abrupt manner was an old Iceland dog, who wandered from door to door mending pans and kettles.

He was not liked in the neighbourhood, but people employed him out of charity, and frequently gave him old and worn-out clothes, which he wore, no matter of what colour or fashion.

On this occasion he had on a red cloak worn like a cross-over, and a green Forester's hat very much on one side.

His toilet was disarranged by his fall, and his tools, which he pushed on a small hand-barrow, were scattered in all directions.

"Ha! ha! I'll be revenged on you for this!" he muttered as he picked himself up and brushed the snow off his clothing. "I'll tell Herr Gunnson all sorts of things about you—I'll be revenged *somchow!*"

Jacob and Holbaek trembled. They knew the Iceland dog's savage disposition and that he never forgave an injury. They apologized humbly, but he would listen to no excuses. He enquired where they were going, and said, with a cunning look from his little blinking eyes, that he would probably meet them again in the Pig-village.

Gustave and Gunni began to cry, and the two elder Goats had some difficulty in pacifying them, and getting them to continue their way to school.

At last, however, they set off once more, the Tinker shaking his head angrily at them, and barking—a sign of very great displeasure.

The Reindeer had a few learned friends coming to supper with him that evening, and was anxious to get rid of the scholars in good time. He therefore closed the school at twelve o'clock, and dismissed everyone with the exception of the Gunnson Goats, whom he requested to stay a few minutes as he wished them to undertake a commission to the Pig-village.

A letter which he had written laboriously, and sealed up with five enormous dabs of red sealing-wax, was to be delivered to the Governor of the village, and the answer left at the school-house on their return journey.

Jacob placed the letter in his satchel, and they started for their walk into the mountains, for the Pig-village was some three miles off.

CHAPTER III.

There was not a tree for leagues round the Pig-valley. On the summit of an inaccessible mountain, it was protected on all sides by rough stone walls; and the little pitch-pine

houses of the Pig-families were clustered together in groups of three or four.

The Goats found the ascent easy, though the Pigs were very seldom able to leave the shelter of their village. The dangers of the road were too great for creatures who were not used to climbing, and then the wolves in that district were unpleasantly numerous.

The Gunnsons were let in through a door in the wall, as soon as they had explained their business, and they made their way down the wide street to one of the more distant houses.

An old Pig was knitting busily, as she paced up and down her small front yard, and she turned with delight as the Goats appeared, and ran forward to welcome them.

"Well, this *is* a pleasure! Come in, my sweet children. How are your honoured parents? The water is boiling on the stove, and coffee will be ready in five minutes."

The hospitable Pig-mother bustled into her kitchen, leaving the door open.

"We must take this letter from the Reindeer to the Governor," said Jacob. "I think we had better go now, and come back as soon as possible."

"Well, go! Go quickly, or the cakes will be spoilt," cried the Pig-mother. "You'll easily find his house. It has a coat-of-arms on a pole in front of the door, and half a suit of armour and two helmets in the entrance passage. He comes of a very high family—Westphalian originally, I believe."



"IN ANOTHER MOMENT THE GOATS WERE ON THE SEE-SAW."

The four Goats ran off and left the letter, saying they would call later on for the reply. They really had the best intentions, and intended to return immediately to the old Pig, as their mother had enjoined them; but on their way back they unfortunately happened to catch sight of a Pig-family enjoying a see-saw on a ladder over a disused barrel, in one of the neatly-kept front gardens.

The young Pigs looked out smilingly, being a hospitable race, and invited the Gunnsons to join in the amusement.

"One turn, only one turn!" said Holbaek beseechingly to Joseph. "I'm sure *one* turn can't matter."

Joseph looked, and his good intentions deserted him.

In another moment the Goats were upon the see-saw, bounding up and down to the great delight of the Pig-family; and no one noticed the Iceland dog's evil eye looking at them through a crack in the palings.

"Let's get the Pigs to start off, and then take the stone from under the barrel," said Jacob in a low voice to his brother. "What a joke it would be!"

"Do you think you would dare?" in a tone of respectful astonishment.

"Dare? Why I have done hundreds of things worse than that," said Jacob proudly. "You just wait till they get on, and see if I dare!"

Holbaek trembled, but did not venture to say anything.

The little Goats were safely landed, and some Pigs took their place.

"You just run off as soon as you can," whispered Jacob to Holbaek; "I'll follow!" And he darted under the ladder, and pulled away the two stones from the barrel.

The moment he did so, the tub rolled round and round rapidly, and the see-saw came down with a thud, bringing its load heavily to the ground.

The Pigs, though they were more surprised than seriously hurt, lay groaning, while the rest of the party turned furiously on the Goats, and drove them into a shed close by.

The noise of the scuffle was so great, that Pigs came rushing into the yard from all directions.

Amongst them was the Pig-mother, in a state of great terror and excitement.

She darted through the crowd, and succeeded in rescuing Gustave and Gunni, whom she led away in triumph; but the two elder Goats, having been the ringleaders in the affair, were kept close prisoners, and only their bleats were heard above the turmoil.

A hasty Pig-Council was held, in which the enormity of Jacob's traitorous behaviour was descanted upon by the two injured Pigs, who, with their heads tied up in cotton pocket-handkerchiefs, gave evidence of the base ingratitude of the Goat-family.

"I'd given them rides, rides upon *rides*, on the see-saw! and this is what they turn round and do to me," wailed one of the Pigs, supported by an aged mother, who fiercely demanded justice.

"Well, you shall decide the punishment," said the Pig-Council.

As the President spoke, the Iceland dog crept forward from behind the paling, and, bowing humbly to the Council, said in a low voice—

"As this is really a very serious offence, and I know the Goats have long cherished a grudge against the Pig-family, I would suggest they should receive a lesson that would last them for some time to come. Shut them both up in the barrel, and roll them down the mountain."

"Will you undertake to do it?" enquired the Council eagerly.

"With pleasure," said the Tinker. "Carry the barrel outside the village, to the edge of the slope, and I will manage the rest."

Notwithstanding the cries of the Goats, and of the Pig-mother, who stood by the gate with Gustave and Gunni, wringing her hands; the two older Goats were led off by the Iceland dog.

They were put unceremoniously into the barrel, and the lid being hammered on, the Tinker pushed off the tub with a violent kick of his foot, and off rolled the unfortunate Jacob and Holbaek, bumping and jolting against the snow heaps, until they disappeared in the distance into the depths of a fir wood.

CHAPTER IV.

The old Reindeer waited long for the return of the Goat-family. His friends had departed and darkness fell over the snowy landscape. He sat in his school-room with a large oil-can by his side, trimming the lamps, and every now and then going to the door to listen attentively, but there was no sound but the wind in the dim passages.

Suddenly a distant scuffling was heard, and the old Pig-mother in a warm cloak and snow-boots, appeared from the gloom, leading Gustave and Gunni, who were weeping silently.

She immediately commenced a description of the adventures of the afternoon, interrupted by grunts of emotion.

"Goats will be Goats," she remarked in a feeling voice, "and though it was, of course, a very wicked thing to do; why the Pig-Council should have revenged itself like this is more than *I* can imagine!"

The Reindeer looked grave, and absently poured the contents of the oil-can into his smoking cap, which he had taken off respectfully when the Pig-mother approached him.

He had a kind heart, and the thought of Jacob and Holbaek spending the night in a tub, and being perhaps discovered by the wolves in the morning, reduced him to a state of great mental agitation.

"It makes me feel giddier than fifteen copies. I can't think what to do for the best!" he said nervously, trying to fit a glass shade into the smoking cap. "I think I had

better start immediately and try and find them. You know which side of the mountain they rolled down ? ”

“ Oh, I could take you to the place in a minute,” cried the Pig-mother. “ I know *exactly* the spot the barrel went into the woods. No one can have got at them yet. We may yet save them ! ”

“ We'll each take a school lamp to help us along,” said the Reindeer. “ Gunni shall carry a coil of rope, Gustave a hatchet, the Pig-mother shall take some coffee in a bottle, and I myself will have a bundle of straw and some lucifer matches, in case we see any wolves about anywhere.”

The Pig-mother turned pale, and shuddered, but she said nothing, and bravely tied up her bottle in a large pocket-handkerchief; and the little party, lighting their lamps, set out with quaking hearts for the forest.

In front went the Reindeer, wearing a fur cap with ear-flaps and a red worsted comforter, carrying the sitting-room lamp with a yellow globe, wrapped in a chenille mat to keep the cold off; then followed the Pig-mother, who had borrowed the green baize school table-cloth as an extra wrap, for the night was freezing; and the procession was finished off by Gustave and Gunni, with small passage lamps, a chopper, a shovel, and the kitchen carving-knife; for as the Reindeer truly remarked, on such an expedition as this there was no knowing what might come in usefully.

The Pig-mother guided the party, grunting out directions in an exhausted voice, for she was not used to violent exertion,

and the Reindeer insisted on jumping over every obstacle.

"Round by the bend in the rocks to the right, fifteen pines to the left, and straight up by the dead birch tree," she whispered hoarsely.

The Reindeer thanked her politely, but as they were now in the middle of the forest, and it was too dark to see more than a yard or two in any direction, he suggested that the Pig-mother should walk in front ; which, after some persuasion, she reluctantly consented to do.

She had lost the coffee-bottle in a snow-drift, but she tried to conceal this fact from the Reindeer by keeping her hands carefully underneath her shawl.

"We are very near the exact spot now," she kept repeating, as they toiled on ; and she was right, for in about half-an-hour they found themselves in an open snow-covered clearing, in the centre of which was a small frozen pond with steep banks sloping down to it.

By the light of the moon, which at that moment burst from behind the clouds, the Reindeer could distinctly see a black barrel outlined against the dazzling whiteness.

"They're afraid of bleating, because of enemies," he observed to the Pig-mother ; "but I'll give the school call, and see if they answer it."

He whistled shrilly three times, and a muffled squeak came from the direction of the barrel.

"That's them !" cried Gustave joyfully.

"Now !" said the Reindeer with his best school manner,

sitting down solemnly on an ice-heap, and placing his lamp in a hole by the side of him, "we have, my dear Pigs and Goats, to consider three things. Firstly, how we can get down the bank, which is almost perpendicular; secondly, what we are to do when we get down; and thirdly, what we are to do if we can't do anything."

"Come up again," suggested Gunni.

"Very poor!" said the Reindeer. "If I were at home I should give you a bad mark. What do you suggest, Pig-mother?"

"All slide down," said the Pig-mother practically.

"Excellent idea!" cried the Reindeer. "You've hit the thing exactly. Put the lamps on the edge, all of you, throw the other things down, and we will follow."

"I think I should like to be tied up in the table-cloth," said the Pig-mother feebly. She was divided between her fear of wolves and her fear of ice-hills.

"Certainly, certainly!" said the Reindeer. "We will do everything we can to make it as pleasant as possible."

The Pig-mother was soon wrapped up and started on her career, bumping violently as she went.

"Poor creature!" said the Reindeer, as he peered over the edge. "I'm afraid she will be very stiff to-morrow! Come, Goats! Every minute is of importance."

Gustave and Gunni helped the Reindeer to guide himself; but in spite of this he arrived on his back with his feet in the air, in a very undignified position.

And now another difficulty presented itself.

The Pig-mother had never walked on ice, and fell down directly she attempted it, but she refused firmly to be left by herself on the bank.

"I think we might drag her along on the table-cloth," said Gunni, as he looked at the Pig-mother critically.

"You have my full permission to do so," said the Reindeer, and he himself walked off actively to inspect the barrel.

Gustave and Gunni managed to get the old Pig across with some difficulty, and as soon as they reached the tub, they heard Jacob's voice proceeding from it pitcously—

"Oh, we'll never behave badly again! It was all my fault. Oh, *only* let us out, and we'll never get into any more mischief!"

"I daresay you won't," said the Reindeer grimly. "Get as far away as possible—I'm going to try and break the lid open."

He took up the hatchet, but found it impossible with all his efforts to wrench the top of the cask off. The more he struggled the tighter it seemed to stick.

"I don't know what's to be done," he said at last, wiping his face anxiously with a large handkerchief. "They've glued it on, I do believe. It seems to me we shall have to take them home in the barrel."

CHAPTER V.

"Lift the cask, and tie a rope round it," said the Pig-mother, from her seat on the green baize table-cloth. "There's a hut close by, where some Foxes live. If you call loud enough they'll be sure to hear you, and they can help pull the tub up the bank."

"What a practical nature!" said the Reindeer admiringly. "So full of resource."

He lifted up his voice and shouted, and in a few seconds the whole Fox-family were gathered on the banks, looking down at the party on the ice with the greatest curiosity. The situation was soon explained to them by their acquaintance the Pig-mother, and they volunteered to do all they could to help the Reindeer.

The Fox-father slid down with two of his sons, and in a very short time the rope was round the barrel, an end thrown up to the other Foxes; and some steps being rapidly cut in the slope with the hatchet, the whole party—with the exception of the Reindeer and the Fox-father—clambered up the bank, and took their position in a long line, with Gustave and Gunni at the end of it.

"We will push the tub to the edge," said the Reindeer. "Then pull steadily, and all together."

The five Foxes, the Fox-mother, the old Pig, and the Goats, seized the rope firmly and prepared for action.

"Don't go too near, I beg of you," said the Reindeer to

the Fox-father. "If it rolled on you, it might flatten you out before you were aware of it!"

"You butt with your horns, and I'll push," replied the Fox-father, "then I'll give the word, and they'll all pull together."

This plan was carried out, and the barrel began to ascend the slope slowly, with irregular jerks.

"One more good pull!" cried the Fox-father.

The Pig-mother threw herself violently on to the rope, the Foxes struggled valiantly, and the tub rose by degrees to the edge, and was landed by a clever push from the Reindeer.

There were groans of relief from Jacob and Holbaek, and the old Pig and the Fox-family threw themselves exhausted on the ground.

"Whew-ew! I wouldn't do that again in a hurry!" said the eldest Fox.

"Nonsense! You may be put in a barrel yourself some day," said the Fox-mother, reprovingly. "Now run and get the wood sledge, to take it up to our house on."

The Reindeer had decided to remain the night at the hut of the hospitable Fox-family; for, as he said, it would be impossible to drag a sledge, and hold the school-room lamp at the same moment, and in the depths of the forest it would certainly be too dark to see without it.

Therefore as soon as the sledge arrived the barrel was hoisted on, and the whole party made their way to the Fox-

house, where they were refreshed with black bread and salt cucumbers.

"If only we had the Iceland dog with his tinker's things, we'd have that tub's lid off in a twinkling," said the Fox-father, thoughtfully.

As he spoke, a series of loud groans, apparently proceeding from the direction of the pond, struck their ears.

The Fox-father jumped up and rushed out, followed by his sons, and the Reindeer.

Something dark seemed to be rolling violently about the pond, and the Fox-father almost stumbled over a small black hand-barrow standing on the very edge of the bank.

"Why, here's the Tinker's workshop," he cried in surprise, "and I do believe that creature down there is the Tinker himself."

"It is! it is!" said a hollow voice. "Come and help me up. I can't move. I've sprained my ankle."

The Fox-father descended, and supported the Iceland dog up the steps and into the house, where he arrived groaning more loudly than ever.

On seeing the two young Goats, his hair almost stood on end with terror.

"I never meant to hurt them. It was all meant in kindness. I'll never do it again!" he muttered incoherently.

"It's my firm belief you were going down to worry them still more," said the Reindeer severely.

"Indeed I wasn't," cried the Iceland dog. "I only

intended to help them out, and if a wolf or two followed me it wasn't *my* fault. I had brought all my tools to open the cask, when the snow gave way and down I fell ! ”

“ Well, the best thing you can do is to open the cask now,” said the Reindeer. “ But mind you do it carefully ! for if a hair of their heads is touched, you shall be punished severely, *I* promise you ! ”

The Iceland dog took his tools from the barrow, and in a few minutes the lid of the barrel flew off, and the two Goats were dragged out—limp and dejected but entirely unhurt.

After a good rest and some food, they declared themselves ready to walk home ; and as the day was already dawning, the Reindeer, after thanking the Fox-family most gratefully for their kindness, collected his possessions and prepared to start for the Goats' home.

Before making his farewells, the Reindeer delivered a neat speech, in which he begged the Fox-mother's acceptance of the sitting-room lamp, with the chenille mat, “ trusting it would be a pleasing reminder of one who would always hold them in friendly remembrance.”

When the Goats and the Reindeer reached the Gunnsons' farm, they found the whole household in a state of distraction.

Herr Gunnson had been scouring the country in all directions on snow-shoes, and Fru Gunnson had lighted up every window in the house with four candles, and remained at the open front door staring wildly into the garden, as if she

expected to see her missing children emerge from behind one of the numerous snow-heaps.

As soon as she beheld the Reindeer approaching, she sank down on the nearest bench, and began to laugh and cry, till her children were seriously afraid she would never recover herself.

Jacob and Holbaek received a severe scolding, with an excellent breakfast; and the Goat-mother insisted on the Reindeer and the Pig-mother taking a week's holiday, during which time she cooked such excellent dinners for them that the Reindeer declared he should be quite spoilt for his own simple *ménage*.

In course of time, Jacob and Holbaek grew into talented scholars, and were trained by the Reindeer to take classes under his own direction.

As for the Tinker, he was never again seen on the mountain.

It was reported that he had emigrated to Lapland; and the Gunnsons were informed by a traveller that he had been captured by the Lapps, and passed a miserable existence as one of the hard-working sledge-dogs.

